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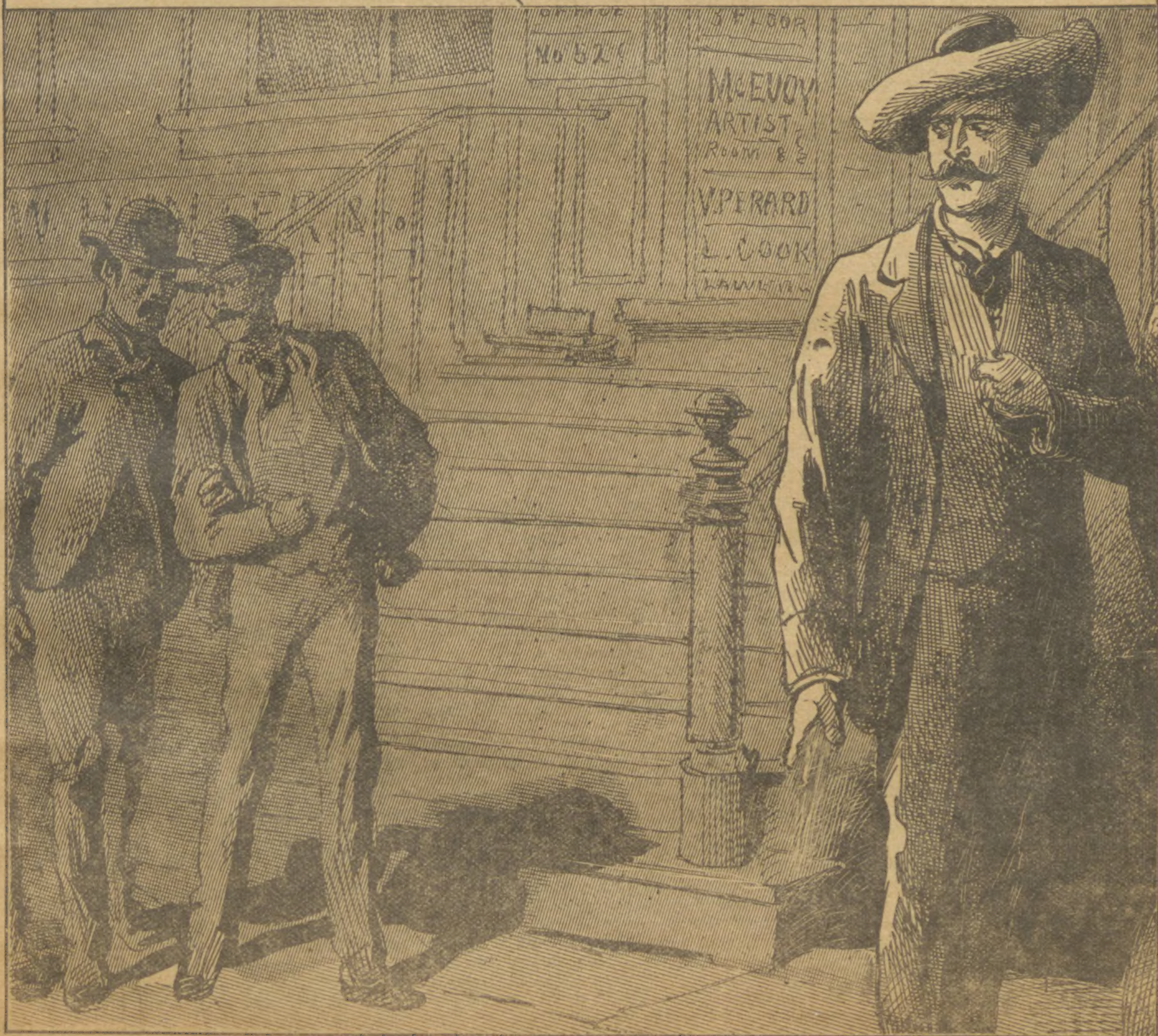
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The Secret Service Special; Or, Lightning Lew's Blind.

BY ED. GAINES BURNES,
Of the New York Police Detective Corps.



HOGUE AND HIS CONFEDERATES EXPRESSED THEIR SATISFACTION WHEN THEY SAW THE MAN THEY WERE LAYING FOR.

THE Secret Service Special

FROM NEW YORK;

OR,

LIGHTNING LEW'S BLIND.

The Story of the Great Detective's
"Cool Combine"

BY ED. GAINES BURNES,
(Of New York Police Detective Corps.)

CHAPTER I.

THE DYING MAN'S REQUEST.

THERE died in one of the principal hotels of the City of New York, a man well known in the State of Virginia, and for many years highly respected there.

The hotel register gave this man's name as John Jones, but it was a name assumed for the occasion—all Kanawha county, West Virginia knew him as Green Sackville.

Almost immediately after being assigned to a room, Mr. Sackville telegraphed to his home in Charlestown that he was ill, and requested his son John to come at once to New York.

While awaiting the arrival of his son, Mr. Sackville grew worse, rapidly, and continued to do so notwithstanding the efforts of the physicians called in by the proprietor of the hotel, who knew the sick man intimately, and his object in coming to New York.

"He will live just about long enough to speak to his son, if there is no delay in answering the telegram," declared one of the physicians, in response to an inquiry from the hotel keeper regarding the condition of the patient.

"And, by Jove! there has been no delay!" exclaimed the latter, standing in the hall, facing the entrance. "If I'm not much mistaken, there is one of the Sackvilles talking to the clerk."

As the landlord spoke, the person referred to left the desk, and walked toward the elevator. He was a young man—twenty-six, or thereabouts—rather handsome than otherwise, and the picture of health and strength. "Just the kind of a fellow to tie to in trouble," Kanawha county folks were in the habit of saying—and "trouble" meant knives and pistols in that particular case, as it often does in the mountains of West Virginia and Kentucky.

Such was Edge Sackville, United States Marshal of the district he lived in and son of the man dying in a room overhead.

"Mr. Sackville?" said the landlord, as the young man drew near.

The latter bowed, and, having introduced himself, the other continued:

"This gentleman is Doctor Maynard, one of the physicians attending your father, who, I am sorry to say, is very ill—very ill."

The already grave countenance of the young man grew still more gloomy as, scarcely acknowledging the introduction, he asked:

"Is there any hope of recovery?"

"None, sir."

Edge Sackville did not flinch. Although the bluntly spoken words cut him to the quick, he made no sign, other than:

"Thank you—for the truth, sir."

Turning away as he spoke, young Sackville entered the elevator, and a few moments later was standing by his father's bedside.

"Where is John? Why didn't John come?"

The dying man uttered the question anxiously—impatiently. John was his favorite son—of the two left him after the war—and for the past two years had become more so than ever; but Ed showed (and, in fact, felt) no jealousy. Quietly he replied to the impatiently uttered demand:

"John was in Wheeling when your telegram arrived, father, and after repeating it to him I came on, fearing it might be too late if I delayed longer or waited for him."

"Humph!" muttered the father, in an unsatisfactory tone. "Humph! Ed, you are still interested in that Parkson girl?"

"I am, sir."

Still quietly, but not so steadily, Edge Sackville confirmed his father's words. It was not in the man's nature to lie; he simply could not do that, and the man lying on the bed knew it, although he querulously commented:

"So I thought—I knew it! Yet you promised to give her up?"

"I did, sir—and have done so," began Ed, and then, as his temper momentarily got the upper hand:

"Little fear of my doing otherwise. That lawsuit was sufficient to compel me to 'give her up,' as you put it, but I never promised, nor can anything compel me to lose interest in Lydia Parkson!"

Beginning bitterly, the speaker ended sadly; and touched, apparently, by his tone, Mr. Sackville replied:

"I did not ask what I did, two years ago, without cause—and good cause, too!" and he paused a moment as if to suppress the rising anger.

"That man, Colonel Parkson, ruined my life—disgraced me," he resumed. "By the most villainous lying—downright perjury—he blasted my reputation, and to-night I am in New York, dying, because of his vile work."

"Is this true, father?"

Earnestly, anxiously, tenderly the young man asked the question, and, at last, understanding his quiet, undemonstrative son, the dying man answered:

"True? Ed, my boy, it is only too true. That man, Parkson, is an unscrupulous scoundrel! I never had any conversation with the United States Commissioner, or any one else, regarding the sale of the land once owned by Parkson, such as he manufactured; I never arranged to have it knocked down to me at any figure, and came here intending to engage detective talent to prove it, if possible. That was the purpose of this journey."

"True? My boy, it is as true as that I shall be dead before midnight—and it is striking eleven now!"

"True!" reiterated the dying man, unconsciously playing upon the word, "True! Great God! Even my own son doubts me! What wonder, then, that strangers should do so?"

"Father, father, you are unjust!" remonstrated the son.

"Eight men swore to having heard you arrange with the commissioner to have the Parkson property sold you—'knocked down' to you—at a given figure, and immediately after it became known, the commissioner committed suicide. Remorse, and fear of the consequences of his conspiracy with you, was the cause, the world said, and can you wonder that, when your nearest friends deserted you, even we—John and myself—felt doubtful at times as to your innocence of a conspiracy?"

The prematurely-aged, broken-spirited man on the bed, shook his head in sad assent, while the son continued:

"But, you are my father, aged beyond your years, and disgrace put upon you, and not weighed down with guilt, or tortured by remorse, as those believe who have watched you fading away for the past two years!"

Dying as he was, Green Sackville gazed in wonder at the depth of feeling exhibited by his son—a man whom he (like many others) deemed incapable of being touched by misfortune of any kind.

"I have misjudged you, Edge—" he began, but was interrupted by:

"Never mind that, father; do not speak or think of me."

"You are dying, and your dying word is better than all the oaths of all the men in Christendom! You came here to employ help to clear your character, but have been compelled to give it up. I will take up the work, which you will not be able to see accomplished, and will never rest easy until justice is done, and your name fully cleared in the judgment of all honest men."

Gratified beyond expression, the dying man thrust forth a thin, wasted hand.

"No, no! I am simply actuated by a sense of justice, duty and honor, father," the son protested, "but the work will be the hardest, the most disagreeable, I could have undertaken. I hate the very thought of the misery it most certainly will involve; for the

clearing of your name necessarily implies the ruin of those who blackened it!"

"But you will do it?" eagerly questioned the dying man. "You will do it—even if it ruins that girl's father?"

"I will! I swear it!"

Edge Sackville's deep, firm, assuring response was barely uttered, when his father gave a low, tremulous sigh and the pallor of the death-agony settled upon his face.

Bending low over the couch and grasping the listless hand, the son waited for the end.

The white lips moved, and in a whisper came the words:

"Thank God! I die happy," and that was all.

CHAPTER II.

A HOPELESS CASE.

"Is Mr. Scott or Mr. Littlefield in?"

"Colonel Scott is, sir."

"I would like to see him—consult with him. Kindly give him this letter."

"Yes, sir, take a seat, please," and the youth in attendance in the outer office entered another room, the door of which bore the sign "private."

The scene was the general office of a famous firm of detectives, situated on Broadway, near Trinity Church, New York.

The first speaker was a young man, grave-looking beyond his years, (for twenty-six is seldom a serious age,) and evidently from his attire, in mourning for some near relative. Further description is needless; the caller was Edge Sackville.

"Walk in, sir!" invited the youth, returning from the inner room, and holding open the door for the visitor.

"Colonel Scott?" interrogated the latter on entering, addressing a fine-looking man, seated at a desk in the center of the room.

"Yes, sir. You are Mr. Sackville, I presume?"

"I am, sir—Edge Sackville," and seating himself in the chair, to which Colonel Scott invited him by a wave of the hand, the caller continued:

"As that letter of introduction, which I received from your superintendent of police informs you, I come from Charleston, West Virginia, and am desirous of engaging your services, in clearing up a matter which was the prime cause of my father's death."

"Please state the case. The main facts will be sufficient, for the present."

"Two years ago certain real estate (which was confiscated by the Government after the war) was sold by the U. S. Commissioner, and bought in by my father, as president of the Charlestown Land and Improvement Company."

"Immediately after the sale—that is within a few days—Colonel Parkson, the former owner of the property, brought suit to have it set aside, alleging that there had been a conspiracy between the commissioner and my father to have the property knocked down to the latter at a low figure."

"Eight men made oath to hearing the arrangement, alleged to have been made between the commissioner and my father, and shortly afterward the commissioner committed suicide—through fear of the punishment awaiting him on the termination of the trial, and the deep disgrace he had brought upon himself, it was then generally believed."

"A few days ago my father died here, in this city—broken-hearted over the charge made against him—and, dying, most solemnly protested his innocence."

"He had come to this city to engage detectives to clear his good name, but being taken sick on arriving, was unable to do so. I reached New York in time to hear his dying declaration of innocence, and to assure him that everything possible would be done to prove it, and thus restore his good name and the family honor."

"And now for the reverse of the picture—our side of the matter?" suggested Colonel Scott, when his visitor ceased, as if his statement was finished.

"There is none—nothing but my father's dying declaration against the oaths of eight men," quietly and sadly answered young Sackville.

"Surely, sir, you have something—some

clue—some suspicion—for us to work upon?" urged the astonished detective.

Sackville shook his head in the negative.

"We have no evidence of any kind to offer in opposition to those affidavits, nor can I give you any hint to work upon. Colonel Parkson is the only person likely to be benefited, but he does not pretend to know anything, personally, regarding the conversation between the commissioner and my father."

"But, sir, there *must* be something," persisted the colonel. "Upon what grounds is the suit to set aside the sale opposed?"

"They—that is, Colonel Parkson, must prove the conspiracy—the burden of proof rests on him; therefore the land company of which my father was president, is endeavoring to throw discredit upon the testimony of his witnesses, and has succeeded in proving that one of them is not to be believed under oath. On the other hand, the company offers the well-known honorable character of the accused, and claims the whole affair is a scheme to enable Parkson to get back the property."

"But, you say the commissioner committed suicide, as if fearing the disgrace and punishment, which must inevitably attend the trial of the case?"

"Such was the general opinion, as I have stated," replied Sackville, and, after a momentary hesitation, adding:

"It was my own opinion, also, until a few days ago, but it yet is, I am quite certain, the belief of the very men who are fighting Parkson—the stockholders of the land company."

Colonel Scott looked puzzled—was, in fact, rather bewildered by his visitor's statement, and asked:

"If that be the case, why are they wasting time and money in fighting this Parkson?—and"—curiously—"what has caused you to change your view of the suicide?"

Slowly, and as if weighing the value of every word, Sackville explained:

"Colonel Parkson is a bold man, if not a desperate one, and not likely to hesitate at anything necessary to the accomplishment of his purpose. He was connected with the Richmond Whisky Ring, and many other shady affairs, but always managed to keep out of the clutches of the law, although his confederates suffered."

"If any other man—a man of ordinary reputation—were opposed to it, I believe the company would throw up the case; Parkson has the reputation of being a man of desperate expedients, and in the hope of something turning up before, or at, the trial, the case is being fought by the company."

"And the suicide?"

"That is something I am half inclined to doubt—that it *was* suicide. It is a serious matter, however, and must be dealt with carefully—cautiously, to get at the truth."

"The commissioner was found just outside the town, with a bullet in his brain, and a pistol in his hand. He *may* have fired the shot, and it looked as if he had, for there were no signs of a struggle of any kind; but, since hearing my honored father's solemn assurance that he was innocent, I have been inclined to doubt the 'theory of suicide.'"

"Have you any reason other than your father's statement for doing so?"

"You will hardly think it a *reason*," replied Sackville, thoughtfully, "but to me the fact that there were threats, (rather mysteriously circulated, and not at all definite,) that it would be *unsafe* to buy at the Parkson sale, seems to suggest the possibility of foul play."

"Just so. Was anything done toward determining whether the man had killed himself or had been killed by an assassin?"

"Nothing. The revolver in his hand, and the recent exposure, were considered sufficient to warrant the verdict of suicide which was unhesitatingly rendered by the coroner's jury."

"Well, Mr. Sackville, you have given us a most difficult case to handle—hopeless, I fear. We have nothing to work on, and unless these men choose to admit that they have perjured themselves, I do not see how we can prove anything against them, or relieve your father's name of its odium."

"Make the trial, at all events, Colonel Scott, make the trial! Perhaps you may be able to get one, or more of them, to admit that the testimony was false—was paid for."

Remember, we have already proved one witness unworthy of belief, even under oath."

"I am not forgetting that fact, but as he is supported by seven others, that amounts to little. However, every little counts, and nothing is too small for notice in this business. Very small things sometimes turn out to be true clues."

"What is the name of that witness?"

"Doctor Hammil."

"And the others?"

"There are five brothers of the name of Owens, one of whom is a magistrate, another superintendent of the Poor Farm, and the others farmers. The other men are also farmers in the vicinity—John Stevens and William Gray."

"Worse and worse! Five farmers, a magistrate and a county official!" commented the colonel, adding:

"We'll take it up, if you wish, Mr. Sackville; but, really, it looks like a useless expenditure of money, as well as of time and trouble."

"Never mind the money! I'll pay you ten thousand dollars, outside your regular fees the day you place the proof of my noble father's innocence in my hands."

"As for time, if you accomplish the work within two years I shall be perfectly satisfied."

"Very well, sir. We will take up the matter. I will write you when I have decided upon what plan to follow, but must warn you that the case now looks hopeless."

"And I fear *is* hopeless," added the colonel, when his visitor had departed.

"However, I'll put it before Lew Pryce. It would be just his luck to unravel this tangle. 'Luck, with wit, makes many a hit,' and it may serve us now."

CHAPTER III.

"LIGHTNING LEW" TAKES THE TRAIL.

THE St. Albans Hotel, Charleston, West Virginia—a month after the conversation between Edge Sackville and the head of the New York detective agency.

Standing at the door of the hotel is John Woods, the landlord, waiting to see what the 'bus will bring from the railroad depot on the other side of the Kanawha River.

"Isn't it pretty near time for the Washington Express, Doc?" asks one of the half-dozen men lounging around the doorway.

The man addressed as "Doc" consults an old-fashioned silver watch, before answering:

"Yes, just about due—and there she is!"

A long whistle indicates the correctness of "Doc's" time-piece—or his shrewdness in guessing—for, a few minutes later, the 'bus comes rattling across the bridge, heading for the hotel.

There is only one passenger, but his baggage is sufficient to cause the spectators to rate him as an individual of some importance, and his elegant clothing and commanding appearance might well drive those of them with any pretension to "style" wild with envy.

"Step in, sir," said the landlord, politely, ushering in his guest to the office while he himself took his usual seat in his easy chair near the reading-room door.

"This way, sir, if you please!" and the clerk from behind the counter in the fine office shoved the register toward the advancing new comer, who at once registered,

"LEWIS PRYCE, NEW YORK."

That conveys no particular information to those who inspect it—as several do as soon as the stranger has disappeared; but to any man "on the force" in New York, Washington, and many other cities, it would mean that "Lightning Lew," as he was generally called in the detective service, was playing a very bold game in thus openly signing his real name.

Having registered, the detective—he was superintendent of the New York agency, and Colonel Scott's right hand man—turned not to the clerk but landlord, now seated in his chair of observation by the reading-room door:

"You are the landlord of this hostelry I assume?"

"Yes, sir; I am the proprietor of the St. Albans," was the answer.

"Yes? Well, landlord, give me the best

room in the house, and have my luggage placed there!" the natty stranger ordered.

"English!" commented those within ear-shot referring to the stranger's use of the word "luggage."

"Also, be good enough to have breakfast ready when I return—the best the house affords!"

"And a regular swell!" was the next comment.

Fifteen minutes later, the now obsequious host conducted his guest to the dining-room, and, having breakfasted, the latter started out for a stroll through the town.

Walking along the main street the elegantly attired stranger attracted no little attention, which was just what he desired, for, contrary to the rigid rule common to all of his calling, Lightning Lew, (in this instance,) was anxious to know, and be known by everybody—in his assumed character of course.

While in the bar of the hotel, the keen detective's observant eye happened to rest upon a piece of coal lying on the back bar. On the coal was a slip of paper—like a label on a specimen of ore, and this suggested to the active mind of the man gazing at it the character he should assume.

"You have plenty of coal in this district I believe," he remarked to the landlord.

"Enough, sir, to supply the world for ages," assured the latter.

"But not easy to handle, eh?"

"Well, not so very easy," admitted the landlord, and his curiosity being excited, added:

"You seem to be well-informed, sir?"

"Oh, no; nothing more than what is common among people interested in coal lands."

"People on the other side of the herring pond, you know," added Pryce, as they returned to the dining-room.

He had spoken in a careless tone, apparently, it was evident, to deceive the landlord; certainly, that was the conclusion of the latter, who could hardly be expected to suspect that the assumption of carelessness was made so plain for his express benefit!

The result of the supposed attempted concealment of his object in visiting Charleston, was that Pryce had barely left the St. Albans when the landlord's tongue began to wag, and before the detective returned from his stroll it was understood that he was a cool speculator—probably representing an English company.

So, through the use of a few judicious words, and the landlord's lively imagination, Pryce had managed to have a business assigned to him—an absolute necessity if one intends to remain any length of time in a small town, and wishes to be above suspicion.

CHAPTER IV.

DANGEROUS QUARTERS.

WHEN leaving the hotel, Pryce had no particular object in view. He had not the faintest idea of where to find his man—this Doctor Hammil, who was the "suspect" that Colonel Scott and his delegate had decided must be the first man "worked"—and to find his man—did not expect to locate him until better acquainted with the place and the people.

"Inquiry would be dangerous," mused the detective. "Sackville says he frequents—or did frequent—the St. Albans. I'll run across him without much trouble, I presume, and when we meet I must take care that we part as friends, for he is *my* mutton, now."

They did meet—and not only in a totally unexpected manner, but much sooner than expected.

Musing over the work before him, Lightning Lew had traversed nearly a mile of the main street, when it occurred to him that he was both tired and thirsty.

The day was warm—hot—and the mere appearance of the people lounging in the shaded doorways, was sufficient to cause laziness and excite thirst; so, entering a saloon the detective asked:

"Can you make me something cool and refreshing?" adding:

"This beastly weather is simply unbearable!"

"You're a stranger, I reckon, or you wouldn't mind it," remarked the man behind the counter, as he set about preparing a drink.

"We don't mind it—it's the usual thing at

this time of the year," continued the speaker—"Bill" Kyle, the proprietor of the place—as he stood smilingly behind his counter, but covertly "sizing up" the stranger.

Kyle, himself, was suspected of being in league with the counterfeiters whose headquarters were in the Gauley Mountains, while his saloon was looked upon as a meeting-place for the latter, and their confederates.

It was for this reason that Kyle was suspicious of strangers. It behooved him to know to whom he was talking.

Totally unaware of the character of the place he had stumbled upon, Pryce replied to Kyle's remark by saying:

"Well, if this is the usual weather, I'm not anxious to stay long.

"But come, what about my drink?"

As Pryce uttered this in a half-jesting, half-irritated way, a man—about forty, rather fine looking, and wearing a long, black beard—entered the saloon.

"Hello! Here's a fellow who fits the description of Doc Hammil!" mentally commented the detective, and addressing the newcomer, asked:

"I say, sir! Won't you join me? Don't like to drink alone, ye know, and make it a point never to treat the man on the other side of the counter."

Notwithstanding his quiet, gentlemanly appearance, Kyle had the reputation of being a "bad" man, and this caused the newcomer to hesitate, for Pryce's tone was anything but respectful.

"Come along, Doc! Nominate your p'izen!" laughingly invited the saloon-keeper, seeing what was wrong.

"Doc! By Jove, that sounds like my mutton!" thought the detective, while the man addressed responded by ordering:

"Same old stuff, Bill—good whisk!"

The talk thus far had been rather noisy, and had evidently aroused the attention of a couple of tough-looking men, who now made their appearance from the rear of the saloon.

"Hello, Doc! Got a bone t' pick with you!" growled one, as they came toward the bar.

"Better choose another time for it," quietly replied "Doc," turning his back to the other.

This seemed to enrage the fellow (who had probably hoped to receive an invitation to drink), and slapping the speaker on the shoulder, he angrily demanded:

"What d'ye mean, Doc Hammil? For two straws, I'd tear ye inter ribbons!"

He was a big, burly ruffian, (fully as tall as Pryce, who stood over six feet), and looked not only capable, but eager to carry out his threat.

"Doc Hammil, eh, for a fact! Then I'll have to take a hand in this, and so make a friend of the doctor," decided Lightning Lew with that promptness which gained him his significant sobriquet. So, addressing the big fellow, he warned:

"My friend, the wisest thing for you to do is to let this gentleman alone—in fact, to clear out entirely!"

"Why? What 'n thunder d'ye mean?" fiercely demanded the tough.

"I mean exactly what I say. This gentleman is about to drink with me, and doesn't want to talk to you. He may not be able to throw you through that doorway, but let me assure you that *I am*, and will do so for a certainty if you disturb us again."

There was a dangerous—a deadly quietness in the tone and manner of this speech that caused the ruffian to glare, and the others to stare, at the elegantly attired stranger.

"Don't bite off more than ye can chew, Hogue!" sarcastically advised Kyle, but who made no further attempt to quell the threatened trouble.

The words acted like a spur on a restive horse.

With a vengeful growl Hogue advanced with clinched fists toward Pryce, yelling:

"I'll fix yer!"

He didn't fix the stranger, however, but for the next couple of minutes did perform some wonderful ground and lofty tumbling, as he was fired through the screen doors, across the sidewalk, and into the gutter!

Pryce had fulfilled his threat, but it was done so quickly that the spectators could not understand *how* it was done—how he had caught Hogue's right wrist, and with a twist

that almost broke it, caused the man to yell with agony; then, exerting all his wonderful strength, he gave the ruffian a back fall—literally throwing him clear over his head!

Most men would have been satisfied with the dose already received, but Hogue's name contained two letters too many—that is, he didn't know when he had enough, and on regaining his feet he rushed back to the saloon, vengeance in his eye and a revolver now in his hand.

Pryce, meantime, had ordered Hogue's companion to "clear out!" The fellow shot an inquiring glance at Kyle, but the latter avoided the look, which appeared to be all the response needed, for the former promptly retorted:

"I've durn good mind t' send you out—feet first! An' I will, too, if Hogue don't do fer ye."

With the first word, the speaker had thrown up a revolver which he had drawn at the outset of the trouble, and now held the detective covered.

Although apparently at the ruffian's mercy, Pryce coolly ordered:

"Drop that pistol!"

An ironical laugh was the response, and the detective quietly continued:

"You had better drop it—it might go off, ye know. I'll give ye just three calls to put it out of sight!"

"One!"

"Stop yer bluffin', or I'll stop yer wind!"

"Two!" calmly continued Pryce, ignoring the threat.

"Three!"

Bang! With the last word came the muffled report of a pistol, followed by a yell of pain from the ruffian, and the threatening revolver fell to the floor, where it harmlessly exploded.

Pryce's cutaway coat was cut English fashion—that is, with flap-pockets,—and when through with Hogue, he had thrust his right hand carelessly into one of his coat pockets—fully expecting trouble from the second ruffian.

Firing through a pocket is not an American trick—Pryce had learnt it in Australia, but it made the detective the real, (though unsuspected,) master of the situation.

With the second report, came a half-dozen of Hogue's confederates rushing from the back room—every man showing at least one weapon, and apparently eager to use it—and at the same moment Hogue rushed in from the street, the blood streaming from a wound in his forehead helping to give him more of the appearance of an infuriated wild beast than that of a man.

Pryce was in decidedly dangerous quarters.

CHAPTER V.

DOUBT AND SUSPICION.

THE rush of a half-dozen heavily-shod men on a board flooring was not, of course, made without considerable noise, and Pryce, being somewhat prepared for their appearance, greeted them with a brace of revolvers.

But, pistols were too common, and human life too cheap to deter such men. It was the voice and appearance of the man facing them that brought the ruffians to a halt.

"Back, you fools! Back!" thundered the detective, now the real Lightning Lew—fierce, fearless and determined—a man prepared to sell his life at a desperate price.

As he spoke, Hogue rushed in, revolver in hand, but only the next instant to pitch forward on the floor. Accidentally, or otherwise, the doctor had thrust out his foot in time to trip and throw the ruffian.

And now Kyle took a hand in.

"That will do, boys," he said. "Hogue isn't hurt, and shouldn't have interfered with this gentleman, anyhow."

"But I'm hurt! An' I'm goin' t' git even, too!" roared the wounded man.

"Served you right! You shouldn't be so quick to pull yer gun—and you're going to git back into that room and have Doc dress your wound. Understand?"

"Git now!"

Sullenly, carelessly, but willingly, the command was obeyed according to the feelings entertained by the different members of the gang toward Hogue and Pate—the wounded man.

"That was a neat shot," remarked Kyle, as the doctor, following the last of the gang, disappeared from view.

"Oh, nothing extra! The trick's stale in Australia—but, I say, sir! What about those drinks?"

There was a startling difference between the easy familiarity of the tone in which Pryce began, and the stiff demand for the drinks, which puzzled the saloon-keeper.

The latter had refrained from interfering in the fight until the last moment, in order to ascertain as much as possible of the character of the stranger, and had finally decided that the latter was a Secret Service officer!

Now, however, he was again in doubt, for Pryce's tone was thoroughly un-American, and his manner that of an Englishman of rank or wealth, addressing an inferior—suave or supercilious according to the caprice of the assumed superior.

This impression was confirmed when, as Pryce ceased speaking, the doctor re-entered, and in response to Kyle's inquiring look explained:

"The fools refuse my services!"

"Why?" asked Kyle, somewhat angrily.

"Why bother about such brutes?" interjected Pryce, scornfully.

"Come, doctor, here's your refresher!" he added, and having disposed of the long-deferred drink, left the saloon almost immediately.

"Know him?" asked the latter, as the supposed "Englisher" departed.

"Yes—and no. He's just arrived at the St. Albans, and is supposed to be an English speculator after coal-lands."

"After coal-lands, eh? Why do you assume that?"

"Well, because it's quite evident from his language and appearance that he's English, and he spoke of coal-lands, and the knowledge people on the other side have of this section, while talking to Woods in the bar-room."

"Humph! Well, it may be all right, but don't you think he was rather foolish to let out his business before securing the land? Real business men don't show their hand in that style."

"Oh, it came out accidentally; and, besides, he didn't exactly say he *was* after lands. That's only the supposition that all seem to entertain."

"I see!" dryly interrupted Kyle. "He said just enough to leave that impression—to gull the inquisitive members of the bar."

Hammil flushed angrily and exclaimed:

"That's *kind* of you, I must say!"

"No, but it's true," retorted the suspicious saloon-keeper.

"Thank you! I'll see you don't have—"

"Hold on, Doc," interrupted Kyle.

"There's no use getting r'iled—especially as your profession is one which develops secretiveness not inquisitiveness, so that my words could not apply to you."

This mollified the man of medicine, and in a few minutes the two were chatting and fraternizing as if nothing had occurred to disturb their apparently intimate relations.

After awhile Kyle asked:

"What was the trouble with those two inside?"

"Hogue and Pate? Oh, they swore I was a friend of this Pryce's, and that he was some spy—the idiots!"

"Well, I reckon they can do without you this time, Doc," said Kyle, seriously, and then adding:

"But, you're sure to be wanted every now and then, as usual. I wouldn't get too friendly with this stranger. He *may* be all right, but it's best to act as if he wasn't. We can't afford to make any mistakes you know, as to strangers."

During the afternoon Hammil visited the St. Albans—his "stamping-ground" in former and more prosperous days. There he again met Pryce, who saluted him with:

"Well, doctor, how are the patients?"

Hammil laughed. He had just received an overdue fee, and being comparatively "flush"—a rather unusual thing for him, he good-naturedly responded:

"Oh, that's all right! They're not the kind that kill easy, or lay up long. Won't you come inside?"

"Just going to suggest that, myself," declared Pryce, and, taking the other familiarly by the arm he led the way to the bar,

which, of course, was the "inside" referred to.

This action caused much surprise among the numerous loungers, and one remarked as if enviously:

"The 'Doc's' in luck!"

"Yes," assented another, thoughtfully, "but it looks queer—that they should be acquainted at all, I mean," and, as if that had suggested something else the speaker arose and went to the clerk.

"Any word from Colonel Parkson, today?" he asked.

"Yes, he's coming back next week, Mr. Owens," was the information vouchsafed.

"Next week won't do!" muttered the inquirer; and leaving the hotel he went to the telegraph office, from whence he sent the following message:

"WHEELING, W. VA.

"COLONEL PARKSON:—

"Return soon as possible. Important matters needing your attention.

"JOHN OWENS."

"There!" he muttered, glancing over the message. "If that fellow's pumping the 'Doc' it will be stopped pretty lively. I've got my eye on him, and that means that I'll make sure of who and what he is."

Returning at once to the St. Albans and finding that the doctor and his new-found friend were still in the bar-room, and apparently going to remain there for some time, Owens entered—his purpose now being to secure an introduction.

Nodding to Hammil, Owens asked:

"Have something, 'Doc'?"

But, "Doc" failed to take the hint, though fully understanding what was wanted, and shaking his head in the negative, continued to converse with his companion.

"Confound him! What does he mean by looking the other way?" muttered Owens, when after waiting a few minutes, he was compelled to leave without having secured the desired introduction.

"I'll have to talk to that fellow," he continued; and, full of wrath, he left a message with the clerk that: "'Doc' Hammil is to come out to the Farm the minute he leaves that bar!"

Then, jumping into his buggy, Owens drove home, evidently in a perturbed state of mind.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DOCTOR GROWS GARRULOUS.

LIGHTNING LEW had a wonderfully hard and strong constitution, which enabled him to withstand the effects of "drinks" enough to intoxicate three ordinary men—when it was necessary to drink as a matter of business—and this was the reason of Owens's wrath against the doctor, for the latter was already becoming boozy and talkative, while his companion was perfectly calm and sober.

"That's a friend of mine—John Owens, keeper of the County Farm," remarked the doctor when the person referred to left the room.

He had not thought it safe to venture upon the introduction, for, though Pryce treated him familiarly, it was in a condescending way.

But the doctor could talk of Owens; and, as his companion made no response, he continued:

"Yes, and he's a fine fellow—great friend of Colonel Parkson's, too," he declared.

This failed to impress the stranger as intended, for, calling for a couple cigars, Pryce remarked:

"Well, if the saying, 'birds of a feather,' etc., holds good in this case, you've got two pretty tough-looking characters in town."

"Hush! Don't talk like that, for Heaven's sake," gasped the other, adding:

"The colonel's a dangerous man to bother, Mr. Pryce, and everybody here is his friend, or willing to be; but he's away above most of the folks in this vicinity, so please be careful how you refer to him."

Long and loud laughed Lightning Lew.

The doctor's cautious, warning tone seemed very amusing, while his mirth alarmed Hammil still more, and again he entreated:

"Don't! It's really dangerous, I assure you."

"Oh, hang it, man! What do you suppose I care about these people? Hang the

colonel—and the keeper, too, for all I care!

"Come, take a cigar, and we'll go for a walk."

The invitation was gladly accepted, but, in passing out, the doctor received Owens's message, or rather order.

"Blast it!" he muttered, and, turning to Pryce, who had caught the words, explained:

"I can't go with you—got to go to the County Farm—just got the call."

"All right; don't delay on my account," was the response, and turning away the detective slowly walked out of the town, rather pleased to have an opportunity of doing some thinking.

"This Hammil evidently fears these men—especially the colonel, and it will be a nice job to make him talk while here under their influence."

"Owens is suspicious of me, that I plainly see, and has sent for the 'Doc' to find out what we were talking about, how it is that he comes to know me, and who and what I am. Well, I guess he'll learn that my apparent interest in himself or his friends, does not amount to much," smiling at the thought.

Thus musing, Lew Pryce continued on, crossing the bridge over the Kanawha until near the center, where he sat down to finish his cigar.

He had hardly left the hotel when the doctor passed him, driving very fast, "as if realizing the necessity of prompt obedience to his master's order," thought the observant rogue-hunter.

After pondering the question for some time, Lightning Lew decided it would be necessary, in order to use him to the best advantage, to remove Doctor Hammil from the influence of Colonel Parkson and his confederates—as he now deemed Owens and others to be.

"I must consult the Sackvilles," he concluded, "for it will be expensive work to get and keep him away from here, yet it must be begun at once," and flinging away his cigar the detective started back for town, unaware of the fact that he had been watched for the previous half-hour by a rough-looking fellow, who now fell in behind him.

The man who had been shadowing Pryce was dressed, and looked very much like, the desperate characters who it was generally understood by the citizens carried on counterfeiting in the Gauley Mountains.

It was early evening; there was still good light; and, just as the detective reached the end of the bridge, he met one of the very men he was going to call on—Edge Sackville!

As soon as the young United States Marshal appeared on the bridge, the man who had been dogging the detective, turned, and walked rapidly in the opposite direction!

With the marshal was a lady—young and beautiful; and, though Pryce would not have dreamt of recognizing his employer in public, Sackville seemed embarrassed and annoyed at the meeting.

"Odd!" commented Pryce. "Can it be possible that he's ashamed of being seen with such a beautiful girl?"

"Hello! What's all this? The doctor, by all that's good!"

And it was that worthy, whose furious driving had attracted the quick ear of the always-on-the-alert rogue-hunter.

"Just the thing I was hoping for!" declared Hammil, as he pulled up.

"Jump in!" he continued. "I saw you going and hoped to catch you coming back."

"Indeed? And why this anxiety, my friend?" mentally queried the detective, as he accepted the invitation, and aloud:

"Your call was a short one. Patient dead?"

"It wasn't a professional call," explained the other, adding: "It was a little matter of business between John—Owens, you know—and myself, about a case we are witnesses in."

"Oho! As I thought! You've been getting pumped—and warned, too, I'll wager," was the listener's mental comment.

"By the way," continued Hammil, who had evidently been treated with something stronger than milk while at the Farm, "did you notice the couple who passed just before I overtook you?"

"Yes."

Lightning Lew's monosyllabic reply was provokingly indifferent to the doctor, who was endeavoring to interest his companion, and this caused him to say more than he would otherwise have ventured upon, in view of the caution still ringing in his ears.

"Well, that is Lydia Parkson—daughter of Colonel Parkson—and the gentleman is one of the colonel's principal opponents in the lawsuit that I was just up to see John about."

"I tell you those two would give something to know what I know," recklessly continued the doctor, "and there would be some fun if the colonel should hear of their being seen together—a regular circus, sure!"

So surprised was Lightning Lew that he remained silent—indifferently so, the doctor thought; and with a half-angry laugh, the man of medicine demanded:

"Were you ever surprised at anything, Mr. Pryce?"

"Not that I can remember," was the unblushing response.

"Very well; wait until you see the house and lots I'll get when the colonel wins the lawsuit I've told you about, and you hear how I came to get it. Then I'll make you own up to a surprise."

"Oh, will you? Then go ahead, my good friend, and cook up the surprise. I'll enjoy it immensely, I can pledge you."

CHAPTER VII.

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS.

"This fellow is losing all caution—going mad, by Jupiter!" mentally declared Lightning Lew, astounded at the reckless way in which his companion was giving away his secret.

He made no further response to the doctor's chatter, however, and when they pulled up at the hotel, a few minutes later, the detective, without ceremony, walked away from the astonished doctor.

Half an hour later, Lightning Lew was in consultation with John Sackville, and received the latter's permission to go to any expense in getting, and keeping, Hammil out of the reach of Colonel Parkson.

"I fully agree with you," declared Sackville, on hearing Lightning Lew's plan. "He will not talk while here—enough to inculcate them; and, besides, we must get somebody else to confirm whatever he says. By keeping him away, we may frighten some of them enough to make them talk, or lead them to open new clues for us."

"Very good, sir. I'll begin on him tomorrow, and send to New York for a good man to work on the Owens party."

Next morning, Lightning Lew made a point of meeting Hammil, and, at once taking him aside, he asked:

"Doctor, you are pretty well acquainted with this part of the country, are not you?"

"Know every foot of it for fifty miles round," was the prompt—even eager reply.

"Are you particularly busy?"

"Not at all! Can I be of any service to you, Mr. Pryce?"

"When can we have a quiet, private talk?" counter-questioned Lew, adding:

"I don't want to attract the attention of these over-inquisitive people that seem to hang around here, so will go to some other place. How about your friend Kyle's?"

"The very place! He has a private room back of the store."

The doctor, apparently, did not see that this was exactly what would attract attention, which really was Lightning Lew's particular object, and so, to make the affair more mysterious, the detective asked:

"Have you a small hand bag?"

"No—yes; I can borrow one here."

"Good!" ejaculated Lew, delighted at thus insuring attention from the outset. "Good! Get the bag and we will be off, for there will be much to do, I imagine."

The bag was procured, and together they passed out of the hotel, followed by the inquiring eyes of the usual half-dozen loungers who, of course, saw the bag, noted the business-like air of the two men, and were amazed to see them enter Kyle's, which place was, as already remarked, suspected of being the counterfeiters' headquarters.

Reaching Kyle's—the *habitus* of which saloon were also astonished at the request for

the exclusive use of the rear room—Pryce began:

"Doctor, if your practice will stand it, I would like to engage your services, as an escort round the country, two or three days each week—"

"Oh, certainly!" interrupted Hammil, delighted at the idea.

"Very good. Now, before going further, I must have your word not to reveal my business—or, I might say, *our* business, for if things go right, I may be able to do something for you—something which will make you independent of your practice."

Hammil looked puzzled, and then as if fearing to offend the other, hesitatingly asked:

"It's nothing—excuse me, but—that is, it is nothing out of the way, I hope?"

"What d'ye mean, sir?" sharply demanded the clue-worker.

"Well, I hardly know myself—but, if it is to be a secret, I give you my word not to speak of it, even if I can't go into it."

"Good for you! You are not all bad, that's evident," thought the detective, and apparently debating the question a moment he spoke further: "I don't understand you, but as my business is simply confidential, and as yet amounts to nothing, I'll take your word to refrain from mentioning it."

"Gladly, sir, gladly! I hope you will—"

"Enough, sir!" and with a wave of the hand Lew commanded silence.

"My object in visiting this region is to ascertain something of the coal lands, and to do so I must visit the coal-beds, examine the veins, etc.; but I don't wish my object to become known at present."

"Of course not, sir! It would be ruinous to your object—if it's buying."

"Very well. Now you understand the necessity of keeping quiet, and we will go as soon as you are ready."

"Ready now, sir."

A few minutes later, the detective and the doctor left Kyle's place and started at once toward the mountains, coming out about half a minute too soon to run upon Edge Sackville, who was walking in the same direction.

As United States Marshal, Sackville, of course, knew all about Kyle and his saloon, because of the suspicion that the proprietor was in league with the counterfeiters, and he was not a little surprised at seeing Pryce and Hammil leaving the place—the latter carrying the hand-bag.

Not wishing to be seen near Pryce, at any time or place, the marshal stopped to allow the others to get well in advance, and by so doing encountered another surprise.

Within a minute after the departure of the detective and his companion the man who had been dogging the New Yorker the previous night started after the two who had preceded him.

"Hogue, by Jove!" ejaculated Sackville; and, quickly observing that that individual was regulating his pace to keep within view of the two ahead, the marshal muttered:

"That looks queer! He's a dangerous scoundrel, and this may be a game where he plays the sportsman, Pryce the game, and Hammil the decoy!"

"I'll have to chip into this myself, for, once among the mountain gang, all this detective's skill and bravery would not gain him five minutes' grace! They'd murder him without much waiting."

"If it is a game—and it looks like it—Mr. Hogue has forgotten to count me in!"

CHAPTER VIII.

A LITTLE LIGHT, THOUGH BEHIND TIME.

To enable the reader to understand the various phases of the intricate case which daring Lew Pryce had set out to unravel, we must leave the mountain-bound party for the present, and go back to a period two years previous to the opening of our story.

In a two-story frame building in Charleston, West Virginia, are two offices—one bearing the sign "United States Commissioner," and the other "Justice of the Peace."

It is about 8 P. M.—Election eve. Seated in the office of the justice are seven men, and in that of the commissioner, two. The latter are talking, and every word uttered is heard in the adjoining office, which is separated by very thin board partition, and in which silence reigns supreme.

The commissioner—a grave-looking, dignified man of fifty-five, or thereabouts—is addressing his companion, who is about the same age, short, stout and jolly-looking.

"Mr. Sackville," he says, "your company should certainly purchase some of that Parkson property. It will go cheap, I fear, because for some reason people seem to think they should not bid for it."

"Why, what's wrong with it, Mr. Carter? The title is all clear—that I am sure of, for I looked into it when Parkson lost it."

"Oh, yes; the title is all right!" assured the commissioner, and, after a momentary hesitation:

"The fact is, Mr. Sackville, that people generally seem to think it will be *unsafe* to buy—or even to bid—at the sale."

"Colonel Parkson has the reputation of being a dangerous man to thwart or oppose, and I've been confidentially informed that he has sworn to make it uncomfortable for all who purchase any of the property."

"Phew! That's it, is it?"

"Yes, that's why I've advised—requested you to have a representative at the sale—one who represents a company, not an individual."

"The property is very valuable, but will go for nothing—indeed, I may not receive a bid unless your company will make one, and, being a corporation, you can do so with safety, for the colonel will hardly undertake a quarrel with your whole list of stockholders."

"Safety, safety!" repeated Sackville, a little angrily. "Why, confound it! that sounds like bulldozing!"

"Yes, you can rely upon it that we'll bid, for I'll be right there to do it myself! Bulldozing is a thing of the past, in this region—with me, at any rate, and fifty colonels couldn't keep me from making a bid, now!"

The jolly old fellow spoke sturdily; evidently he meant every word he said, and would carry out his intentions, and be on hand, in person, at the sale.

The men in the adjoining office exchanged significant glances, but not a word was said until the men in the commissioner's room had departed. Then one declared:

"The colonel must know this right off, boys! Stay here until I return."

"You're right, John! We'll wait," assured another, while a third asked:

"Will ye be long away, Mr. Owens?"

"No, no! At last I don't expect to be, but wait, anyhow, until I return to report."

With these words, the first speaker left the office, and the others began discussing the conversation they had overheard.

After a half-hour had elapsed, the man who inquired how long Mr. Owens would be away grew uneasy, and finally declared that he *must* leave.

"I have a patient to call on at nine," he explained, "and will be late, as it is."

"Tell John," he continued, addressing another who bore a striking resemblance to the absent man, "that I will return as soon as possible to hear his report and consult further."

"Be sure, now, Doc—don't delay anywhere!" urged the other, as the doctor departed.

Half an hour after, John Owens returned, accompanied by yet another individual, whom he addressed as "colonel"—the Parkson referred to by the commissioner and his visitor.

Both Owens and his companion became exceedingly angry on learning that the doctor had gone, and held a private conversation, which was ended by the colonel saying:

"Very well; go to Kyle, and see if he can do anything or suggest anything."

John Owens departed, and returned within ten minutes with the doctor—somewhat the worse for liquor—and one other man.

"Sit down!" directed Owens, addressing the last arrival, and, producing a key, he opened the door leading into the commissioner's office, through which he and the colonel passed, closing and locking it after them.

Drawing down the shades, and turning up the gas, Owens, in a loud voice, began:

"I tell you, Mr. Sackville, this property will be knocked down to your company at such a ridiculously low figure that you can

well afford to give me five hundred dollars."

"Well, perhaps we can, but I must have some assurance that we *will* get the property for twenty thousand dollars, before paying you anything, Mr. Commissioner."

"That's easy enough. Send me a check in the morning, but instruct the bank not to pay it until after one o'clock, if you like. The sale will be over before twelve, and you can attend to see that, the moment your bid is made, the property will be knocked down to you."

Parkson paused (as if reflecting) for a few moments before replying:

"No, I won't do that. Checks sometimes tell tales, commissioner, and I prefer to trust to your honor. You shall have the money, in bills, to-morrow morning, and I will attend the sale myself to make the bid."

"Thank you, Mr. Sackville, thank you!"

"Well, that is all there is to be said or done to-night; so let us go."

Turning down the gas, Owens unlocked the street door and both passed out, carefully locking the door and examining the other fastenings before going away.

Ten minutes after this scene in the commissioner's office had closed, John Owens returned to the magistrate's office, and invited the seven men awaiting him to "come down to Kyle's," adding, significantly:

"I hope you have good memories, boys!"

The Parkson property has been sold, and the Charleston Land & Improvement Company, through its president, Mr. Green Sackville, has become the owner—having made the only bid offered at the sale.

As usual in such cases, the company's check for ten per cent. was immediately delivered to the commissioner, who had himself acted as auctioneer, the balance of the purchase-money to be paid within thirty days, or on delivery of the deeds, if immediate possession was desired.

The company was wealthy, and notified the commissioner at the sale that the deeds were desired as soon as convenient.

"Within five days," declared the commissioner, adding: "It will take that long to make out the necessary documents."

An hour later Colonel Parkson was closeted with John Owens, and the leading lawyer in Charleston.

That night the colonel and the lawyer took the train for Wheeling, having spent the entire day in consultation, and in taking the affidavits of several of the men present during the previous evening, when Parkson and Owens went through the mock scene in the U. S. Commissioner's office, as we have described.

Two days later the commissioner was served with an injunction restraining him from consummating the sale of the Parkson property, based on papers charging him with having conspired with Green Sackville to "knock down" the property to the company, of which the latter was president, at a given, and ridiculously low, figure.

One week later.

"Ed, I cannot believe it! Surely, you are jesting?"

The speaker was a tall, elegantly-formed girl of seventeen or thereabouts—beautiful, and queenly-looking. A splendid specimen of early womanhood.

The person she addressed was an equally fine specimen, in his way, of manhood, being also tall and powerfully built, and, for a man, handsome.

The scene was Colonel Parkson's apartments, in the St. Albans Hotel, Charlestown, the lady was Lydia Parkson, and the gentleman, Edge Sackville.

In response to the lady's words, the gentleman shook his head sadly and answered:

"It is but too true, Lydia. Eight men have sworn to the truth of the accusation against my father and the United States Commissioner, and I cannot complain of your father's request that all intimacy between us cease until the truth or falsity of the charge has been established."

"But, if it is established, Ed?"

With tremulous anxiety the girl asked the question, revealing the interest which the result—the answer—possessed for her, and causing an additional shade of sadness to

darken Sackville's countenance as he gloomily answered:

"Should it be proved, then we part altogether. I have promised your father that I shall not attempt to meet you until the case goes one way or the other, and if against my father, then to see you but once—thereafter to be as strangers."

"Oh, Ed! How could you do that? What difference can it make to us—what have you to do with it?"

"Much—too much! I cannot blame your father—I could not ask—accept, such a sacrifice as would be involved in—"

He stopped, looking a little confused, while the girl blushed, but after a moment bravely went on:

"—In uniting yourself to one with a disgraced name"

As Sackville finished, Colonel Parkson entered, looked sharply from the sad-faced young man to the tearful girl, and stood waiting, apparently, for the former to leave. So Sackville understood it, and, bowing to the colonel, said:

"It may be the last time, sir—leave me for five minutes."

Without a word the colonel left the room, and the lovers were alone.

But little more was said. The distressed girl sunk down upon the sofa, quite overcome with the shock the young man's announcement and decision to leave her had caused.

Young Sackville stood irresolute for a moment, hat in hand, struggling with his love and pride, and then, without so much as a kiss, he left the room, leaving his betrothed his betrothed no more, until that stain on his father's name could be obliterated, and the Sackville honor again restored.

CHAPTER IX.

SUSPICIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES.

As the young marshal, Sackville, followed the party toward the bridge, it occurred to him that possibly Lew Pryce was endeavoring to entrap the doctor into doing something illegal, to thus get a grip on him.

"But it's a mighty dangerous game to play," mused the marshal, "for by playing the doctor as a decoy, the counterfeiters would be apt to rake in the stakes. However, there shouldn't be any need of warning such an old Secret Service man of the danger of fooling with counterfeiters—if that's the game Pryce really is playing."

Thus musing, and keeping just in sight of his party, the marshal had reached the center of the bridge when Hogue turned and looked back.

That ended the chase for that day, for, far away as Sackville was, the counterfeiter knew him; so, turning into the railroad restaurant near at hand, Hogue ordered some food, as if to excuse his presence there.

The ruffian had only recently been released from prison, after serving a term for counterfeiting, but as there was nothing positive against him now, he felt quite at ease as far as arrest was concerned, though inwardly raging at then being prevented from following Pryce and Hammil, as he deemed it so necessary for him to do.

Sackville followed, and satisfied that Hogue was really in the restaurant, he took up a position outside, which would prevent the ex-convict from again shadowing the others without being seen.

Ten minutes had hardly elapsed, when Hogue grew tired of waiting. Watching the marshal through a window, he saw that the latter meant to remain, and coming out he started back for the town.

Sackville once more followed, close at his heels. On the bridge, the counterfeiter sat down, Sackville doing likewise, saying:

"Well, you are around again, I see, Mister Hogue?"

"I ain't doing nothing!"—surlily.

"No, nothing good, I will guarantee," quietly corrected the marshal, causing the other to emit a vengeful growl, and to look what he dared not say, or attempt openly.

Young as he was—twenty five—Edge Sackville had established a terror striking reputation among law breakers of every description, but especially among the illicit whisky men and counterfeiters, of that wild region.

Like most of his kind, Hogue was a "stab-

in-the-back," and, though a bigger person, would not dream of attacking the resolute young man beside him. He sat in sullen silence, for a few minutes; and, then, finding the marshal did not intend to leave without him, walked back to Kyle's—Sackville attending him to the door of the saloon.

"Them fellers are up to no good!" angrily exclaimed Hogue, on entering and finding the proprietor alone.

"How d'ye know?" demanded Kyle, a wicked gleam shooting from his cold blue eyes.

"Well, they started for the mountains, and I followed till I caught that cursed marshal follerin' me. I tried t' shake him off, but 'twasn't no use, 'n' he kem right back t' the door wu'd me."

"You shouldn't have come here at all!" sharply reprimanded Kyle.

"Couldn't help it; no place t' go t' except the cave, 'n' I couldn't bring him there."

"True," muttered Kyle, savagely, and to Hogue.

"Nick, you'll have to look out for these people—though I confess I can't understand the 'Doc's' part in this little game, if game it is."

"N' more kin I. What'll we do 'bout it, anyhow?" demanded the crook.

"I don't care much, but it *must* be stopped somehow!" declared the saloon-keeper, viciously.

"If the doctor is playing double, it won't do to question him much, but I'll try to find out what they're up to. If he refuses to talk—then he must take his chance with the others."

"An', what 'bout them?"

"You must arrange for that after I've seen the 'Doc' to-night. Stay around until I've seen him; after that we'll know whether it's two, or three we're to deal with, and you must be on hand to get your points."

Nothing more was said between the confederates—the entrance of several customers preventing further conversation.

Sackville, meantime, had gone back to the St. Alban's Hotel, to await the return of Pryce and the doctor, which took place, about four in the afternoon—the detective purposely timing their arrival, so that it would be noticed by the greatest number of people in and about the hotel.

Both men looked dusty and tired—especially the doctor, who carried the hand-bag. They proceeded immediately to Pryce's room, remaining there over a half-hour before descending to the dining room.

All who witnessed the arrival of the two men had remarked that, notwithstanding the satchel's small size, the doctor seemed to find it no light burden, and many significant glances were exchanged—all pointing from the bag to the, apparently, unconcerned United States marshal, who seldom frequented the hotel, but who now mentally decided:

"By Jove, he's *trapped*!"

CHAPTER X.

THE COAL BUSINESS BOOMING.

AMONG others who were present when Lightning Lew and the doctor returned from this mysterious journey to the mountains, were Colonel Parkson and John Owens—the former having just arrived from Wheeling.

The confederates—as they appeared, and were believed to be—were standing in the reception room, and were not, therefore, noticed by the doctor.

"That's a queer caper, colonel?" suggested Owens.

"Yes," slowly assented Parkson; "find out what he is doing, as soon as he comes down."

The colonel was a shrewd, determined-looking man, apparently about forty-five, well dressed and of commanding appearance. He spoke as if rather displeased, and Owens hastened to say:

"There was not a word about this last night, colonel, I assure you."

"Well, I have no time to bother about it. Call him aside when he comes down, and, then, come to my room."

"I have done better than asking him—though he would not dare play us false—I have arranged to find out what is in that bag, while they are down to dinner, so, if he should lie, it will do him no good."

"I should say not!" slowly, and with great emphasis, agreed the colonel; "he would *last possibly* twenty-four hours—certainly not longer."

Cold and cruel, thoroughly unscrupulous, there was no mistaking the meaning of the colonel's words or demeanor.

Lightning Lew was certainly attracting much attention. Already the counterfeiters, the United States Marshal, the Owens party and Colonel Parkson—not to mention the various idly curious people in and about the hotel—all showed that they were interested in his movements, and in his connection with Doctor Hammil.

John Owens was the first to discover, as he thought, Pryce's *real* character, and his business with the doctor, and, then, through him everybody's curiosity was satisfied.

As soon as Pryce and Hammil entered the dining room, Owens entered the former's room—by the connivance of the chambermaid—and there, nicely arranged in the top bureau drawer, found a number of specimens of coal—all labeled, showing where from, depth and extent of the vein, quality and price!

On the chair was the hand-bag—empty except for a few splinters of coal.

With a half-angry laugh, Owens rushed out of the room to Colonel Parkson's apartments.

"Would you believe it? He is a coal speculator, colonel! I have seen the samples, bag and all!"

"Mare's nest, eh?" dryly inquired Parkson.

"Well, yes," sheepishly admitted Owens. "But, colonel—it did look mighty queer!" he averred.

"Yes, I suppose so. However, have Hammil tell you whatever he knows about this man; it may be useful to know the fellow, after all."

"I will look out for that, sir," assured Owens, and descending to the dining room, looked in to make certain that the doctor was still there.

"Having a good time, too!" muttered Owens, a little enviously, as he noted the bottles and dishes piled on the table between Pryce and Hammil, both of whom appeared to be enjoying themselves immensely.

One solid hour Owens had to wait before the "coal men" left the table; then as they were passing out, he called:

"One moment, doctor! Want to talk to you on farm business."

"Go ahead!" urged Lew, seeing what was up, and guessing what had happened—having purposely left the bureau drawer open, and the bag exposed on the chair.

"Come down to Kyle's," he suggested; "you will find me waiting there."

Sackville, who had also waited, heard this order, and preceded the detective in the direction mentioned, walking slowly so that the latter should pass him—which soon happened, when he said, in a low voice:

"Meet me to-night! Look out for yourself in Kyle's! They are onto your game, I think."

Lightning Lew, of course, made no sign, but did wonder what the deuce it meant? so, on entering the place referred to, shot an inquiring glance at the proprietor and his guests.

Kyle looked, as usual, calm and smiling, and before the detective could speak pointed toward the door, saying:

"I see you have got your shadow with you."

"Yes, my friend the doctor and I agreed to meet here," quietly returned the detective, without turning his head.

"Now that you are here, Doc," he continued, "let's have a cigar and a few minutes' chat."

The cigars were produced, and the two adjourned to the rear room, where Lightning Lew opened the conversation with:

"Now, doctor, I don't care a rap about your business with Mr. Owens, Mr. Parkson, or anybody else, but I do object to anybody—no matter who—knowing *my* business."

"It may be that I can do something for you—perhaps a great deal—but that depends upon yourself. A closed mouth is what is required, until I have completed my arrangements."

"I will remember," answered Hammil.

"But, have you remembered?"

Hammil looked confused, and after a few moments' hesitation, explained:

"Well—the fact is—somebody saw us to-day and when John Owens asked what I was doing, and I said it was private, he laughed at me, saying it was coal."

"Confound the prying!" adjured Lightning Lew, in assumed chagrin.

"I suppose you admitted it?"

"I had to, but—"

"Never mind; let that go! Now it's known what we are doing, but nothing more, I hope."

There could not have been, through Hammil, at all events, since he knew no more, so his reply was as truthful as strong in the negative.

"Very well, then; let it be so; the harm is done as far as it can go. Meet me at the hotel to-morrow, at ten, and we will continue the work, but I shall have something to say before we start."

"Now, I must call on one of these land-owners, so I'll say good night. If the price is low, I may stay some time to get all the information I can about the land. I want all the knowledge I can get."

Little his dupe suspected what kind of knowledge the wily New Yorker was planning to worm out of him!

CHAPTER XI.

KEEPING UP THE INTEREST.

LIGHTNING LEW had not left his man more than five minutes when Kyle approached, and asked:

"Well, Doc, going into business with our friend?"

"Wish I had a chance to!"

"What were you winking about so, this morning?"

"Oh, it's no secret, now, so I don't mind telling you we were picking specimens of coal."

"Coal, eh? That was the first story, wasn't it?"

"Why, of course!—and it's a fact!" indignantly asserted the doctor; and we will be at it again, to-morrow."

"Where?"

"All around this section. Wherever he chooses to go."

"Indeed? Say, Doc, don't you know it's rather dangerous to tramp around the mountains poking your nose into other people's affairs?"

The menace contained in Kyle's quietly-spoken words, caused the other to ask:

"What the deuce are you driving at, Bill?"

"Come, come, Doc! No use trying to blind me; what is he after?"

The saloon-keeper's tone and manner were decidedly threatening, and, rather alarmed, the doctor replied by swearing that he had stated the exact truth.

"Somebody saw us to-day at work, or I could not now have confessed that much," he declared.

"Who saw you?"

"That I don't know, but, when we got back everybody at the hotel knew it—at least John Owens could tell me so."

This seemed to stagger Kyle; but Hogue, who had heard what passed, remarked:

"Funny kind o' coal you must be after, when ye take the marshal 'long wid ye."

"Marshal? Hanged if you are not all going crazy! What do you mean?"

"You shut your trap, Hogue!" ordered Kyle, who began to believe there had been some mistake, and did not wish to say too much.

"Never mind, Doc," he continued, "I will explain some other time."

Kyle quietly questioned the doctor until satisfied that if Pryce was a detective, the doctor did not suspect it.

"Detective!" repeated the muddled man, when the idea was suggested. "Detective! Yo'r all drunk 'r crazy! Fine fell'r—spl'nd' gen'l'm!"

The doctor was taken home by Hogue, and turned up in good shape, early next morning, at the Hotel St. Albans, which had now become his headquarters.

As Pryce had foreseen, the physician could not await the appointed hour of ten, but was in the hotel at eight, hoping to meet the coal prospector.

He was disappointed, however, for it was

the far-seeing detective's object to leave his man to the tender mercies of inquisitive bar-room loungers.

At ten o'clock, Lightning Lew descended to find himself the target of all eyes; but paying no attention to any one, he inquired for his mail.

There was one letter, and a telegram. The latter informed him that his comrade, "Bob" Forrest, would meet him at Kanawha Falls, within three days.

This was in reply to a telegram sent by Lew asking for a man to work on the fears of the Parkson party, after Doctor Hammil was once lured out of Charlestown.

Both telegrams were, of course, in cipher, while the letter *apparently* came from England to New York, and was there re-stamped and re-directed to Charlestown.

As this was known long before Mr. Pryce made his appearance, it accounted for the increased interest exhibited in himself and his affairs, for, to do the doctor justice, he had given very little information to the inquisitive public.

"Things are now getting into shape for another move, and I must get Hammil down to business," Lew decided, and turning to the clerk, he said:

"I am going to my room. In five minutes you will send—what's his name—oh, yes! Doctor Hammil, to me, if you please."

"Certainly, sir, certainly!" exclaimed the obsequious clerk.

Three of the five minutes had elapsed, when a waiter knocked at the detective's door, to say that Colonel Parkson would be pleased to have a few minutes' conversation with Mr. Pryce.

"I have a prior appointment, but if Mr. Parkson is in a hurry you may show him up at once," directed Mr. Pryce.

"And in that event, you will please tell Doctor Hammil that there must be no more drinking this morning!"

"Yes, sir; but the colonel is waiting below for you," ventured the waiter.

"The colonel—I presume you mean Mr. Parkson—isn't ill, is he?" smoothly inquired Mr. Pryce.

"Oh, no, sir!"

"Then, if he is anxious to talk to me, he can come here! If not, send up Hammil!"

"One's bad—t'other's worse!" muttered the unfortunate waiter, who feared to face the fiery colonel with such a message.

"I wonder what's in the wind, now?" soliloquized Lightning Lew.

"Is the doughty colonel on the war-path, or getting nervous? Going to force a fight on me? That would be an easy method of getting rid of an annoying neighbor. Or is he about to make friendly overtures? It is some little game, I'll bet."

"Well, it doesn't matter. I'll soon know, and whichever way he's inclined, I'm ready to meet him half-way!"

CHAPTER XII.

TWO PROMPT MEN.

THE previous night, at an arranged interview with young Sackville, Lightning Lew had been warned that he was suspected by the counterfeiters of being a detective, and by the respectable residents of the town it was thought that he was dealing with the Gauley Mountains law-breakers—information which gave the detective no concern, for he remarked:

"It will be all right in the morning," and then, after a momentary hesitation, continued:

"May I ask, Mr. Sackville, what connection there is between Miss Lydia Parkson and yourself?"

Sackville started like a man struck a sudden blow.

"What do you mean by that, sir?" he sharply demanded, and before Lew could reply, continued:

"With Miss Parkson you have nothing whatever to do. Your business is to prove my father innocent of the charge made against him!"

"Which work I am beginning to believe possible," calmly returned the detective; "but, in doing that, I shall probably prove Colonel Parkson guilty of subornation of perjury, and should like to know your wishes as to what I shall do in that event."

Sackville winced perceptibly before answering:

"Show me your proofs; then I will decide."

"Very good, sir. I thank you for your warning regarding the counterfeiting suspicion, and if you will be in the neighborhood of the St. Albans between ten and thirty-to-morrow morning, I will walk across the bridge, and there make you a report, giving the reason for my asking you regarding Miss Parkson."

"Your following me will, if noticed at all, cause people to think that you alone are ignorant of what will be well known to-morrow morning."

"Why not report to-night?"

"Because I have had a long, hard day of it, and have been compelled to eat and drink too much to put 'my man' in proper condition for my purpose."

"Moreover," supplemented the detective, "I am to do *my business*"—great emphasis—"in my own way, or not at all."

He was just a little bit "riled," and seeing it, Sackville smilingly assented:

"Of course, Mr. Pryce. I shall be on the lookout for you."

Lightning Lew bade his employer a pleasant "Good-night," and immediately retired.

All this is necessary to explain what happened when Mr. Pryce bade the waiter "show up" Colonel Parkson, or "send" Doctor Hammil to his (Mr. Pryce's) room. It must also be explained that Colonel Parkson, since the death of his wife—years before—had, with his daughter and her maid, resided at the St. Albans Hotel.

On receiving the message from Mr. Pryce, Colonel Parkson became very indignant. He was a big fish in the little Charlestown pond, and not accustomed to "playing second fiddle" to anybody.

"Very well," he said, in a tone that gave the words an exactly opposite meaning, and without another word marched toward the hotel entrance.

As the colonel reached the doorway, two unfortunate things happened: Edge Sackville sauntered up, and, unaware of the colonel's presence, stood for a moment speaking to an acquaintance, just as Lydia Parkson came through the hall, dressed for the street.

In view of the fact that, since the beginning of the suit between the Land Company and Colonel Parkson, Edge Sackville had never tarried at the hotel, until the previous day, and that, although the doctor had kept his mouth closed, there was a rumor that Miss Parkson and Sackville had been seen together recently, this was decidedly unfortunate—not to say dangerous.

Already irritated, the colonel, in the sharpest tone he had ever used to his daughter, said:

"Wait in the reception-room!"

The girl colored slightly, but sufficiently to confirm the colonel's suspicions, and as she turned back he advanced to Sackville, whom he tapped on the shoulder, demanding:

"Why are you here, sir?"

"What do you mean, sir?"

Sackville's tone was even sharper, more angry, than Parkson's, as he swung round and stood looking defiantly at the latter.

In an instant both cooled—the colonel because it was of his daughter he must speak, and the marshal for the same reason.

"I understood you were not to come here," said Parkson, tentatively.

"I am here on business, sir," explained Sackville.

"Oh! Pardon me for questioning you," and the colonel turned back into the hotel, but stopped at the doorway to ask:

"By the way, I should like to have a word or two with you some time to-day?"

"At noon I am at your service," calmly answered Sackville.

The colonel bowed, and, three minutes after he disappeared within, Lydia Parkson came out and attempted to cross the street.

We say "attempted," because just as she reached the middle of the highway, a recklessly-driven carriage, coming noiselessly through the unpaved street—almost upon her, when Edge Sackville, with one tiger-like spring, threw her back with one hand, while with the other he checked the horses.

A cheer—in which even the colonel joined,

as he rushed to the assistance of his daughter—which changed almost instantly to one of horror, greeted Sackville's action.

The furiously driven horses had thrown and were dragging the marshal, still hanging to the rein, to certain injury, if not death!

A half-dozen men rushed to Sackville's rescue, but, even as they started, a pistol-shot rung out, and the horse grasped by Sackville dropped dead!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESULT OF THE RESCUE.

WHEN Colonel Parkson received Pryce's message and started toward the hotel entrance, the waiter "sent up" Doctor Hammil.

Lightning Lew's apartments faced the street just over the entrance to the hotel, and he was standing at a window when Edge Sackville rushed to the rescue of Lydia Parkson.

"I warned you that I had something of importance to tell, this morning," Mr. Pryce was saying, in a very severe tone, "and yet you are already under the effects of drink. Really, I am afraid to trust you, but—"

At that moment Edge Sackville jumped to stop the horses, the next, he was down, and being dragged, and, seemingly but a second later, was lying half covered by the body of the horse he had grasped!

An old soldier—or rather one who had gone through more scenes of danger during the war, than *any one* soldier—Lew Pryce had seen that the effort to throw back the girl, and at the same time check the horses, would certainly result in Sackville's losing his balance.

Whipping out his revolver, he fired, and with such deadly accuracy of aim that the horse fell, shot through the brain.

In a moment the other horse, checked by the weight of its mate, was easily brought to a stop, and Sackville was carried into the hotel—unconscious.

"Hurry down!" cried the detective, seeing the horse fall on the man; and Hammil obeyed, meeting those who were carrying Sackville into the hotel.

By the clerk's orders the insensible man was borne to one of the first-floor family rooms and placed on a bed.

Hammil followed, and as he passed in, some thoughtful lady guest placed in his hand a spoon and her bottle of camphorated spirits—knowing their efficacy in such cases.

As he advanced to the couch, Colonel Parkson arrested his attention.

"No drugs now, Hammil!" said the colonel, warningly, as if either suspicious of the physician's condition to administer medicine or restoratives, or as if he really did not wish the unconscious marshal to be revived.

Hammil turned upon the magnate.

"As a physician, Colonel Parkson, my duty is plain. I shall do the best for this case I can, and will brook no orders from any one!"

He spoke calmly but decisively. His professional honor was dearer to him than any sense of obligation to the man who, for some unexplained reason, seemed to have supreme influence or authority over the doctor.

The two gazed at each other a moment questioningly, then the colonel stepped away and the doctor proceeded to his work.

The spirits were not then administered, but a careful examination of the body was made.

"A broken arm and two broken ribs!" was the announced information to the few persons in the room, ten minutes later.

"Clear out, all of you!" he continued, in the authoritative professional tone, and all obeyed—except Colonel Parkson.

"Will he bear removal without injury?" asked the colonel.

"Oh, yes! He is all right, as far as that goes."

As the doctor finished—and he was an excellent surgeon when sober—Sackville opened his eyes, and asked:

"Is she safe?"

Standing in the background (hearing but not seeing), Parkson noted the anxious tone of the question, and for a moment looked a little troubled; then turning, he left the room.

"All safe, Mr. Sackville," assured the doctor.

"Thank God!"

As Sackville uttered the words, in a tone

of intense relief, his eyes closed and he once more became unconscious.

"Hello! Can there be anything more?" cried Hammil, and at once making a yet more careful examination of his patient, found that there was not.

"Must be the excitement," decided the doctor, and, having set the arm, and attended to the ribs—during which Sackville returned to consciousness, asked:

"Shall I have you taken home, sir?"

"No, you shall not!" countermanded a voice from the doorway, and Lydia Parkson entered.

Following his daughter, came Colonel Parkson, and before the others recovered from their surprise, he said:

"Mr. Sackville, my daughter thinks you can be better cared for here for a few days, than at your own home, so, if you see fit, you are welcome to all we can do for you."

His voice was calm, and the invitation seemingly given with unconcern.

Not so Lydia's, as she supplemented:

"There is no one to care for you at home except servants—we can certainly do as much, and *would* do more than they will or can."

"I would prefer to go home," quietly returned Sackville, and to the doctor:

"A carriage, if you please, and at once!"

The doctor turned inquiringly to the colonel; the latter nodded assentingly, and, as Lydia did not again protest, he obeyed, leaving the room to order the carriage, as directed.

"We are, of course, deeply indebted—" began the colonel, as Hammil left the room.

"Not at all, sir! Any man, near enough, could and would have done the same," interrupted Sackville.

The colonel flushed angrily, bowed, and motioning his daughter to precede him, withdrew.

Lightning Lew, meantime, had gathered from the conversation of the guests and frequenters of the hotel, that Sackville was not seriously injured, and he was probably the most unconcerned man in the house when the latter was helped into the carriage.

The surgeon would have accompanied his patient, but the latter had no liking for the man, and after getting into the carriage, declined any further attendance.

"Send me your bill as soon as convenient," he said, "as I shall call for my own physician on my way home."

Rather crestfallen, and now thoroughly sobered, the doctor re-entered the hotel.

"Hello! Not going with him, Doc?" came the jeering question from a half dozen spectators of Hammil's discomfiture, but the irate man of medicine vouchsafed no reply.

Pushing his way savagely through the entrance, the doctor met Colonel Parkson, who asked:

"Don't know who fired that shot, do you, doctor?"

Almost simultaneously came the invitation:

"Wish you would remember to lunch with me, Doctor Hammil!"

The invitation, coming from Mr. Pryce, relieved the physician's embarrassment, and made him feel rather proud.

"I will not forget, Mr. Pryce," he replied, and turning to Colonel Parkson, continued:

"There is the gentleman who fired the shot—Mr. Pryce!"

Then, there was more excitement, and a general buzz of conversation followed.

Until the doctor announced the fact, no one had the faintest idea that Mr. Pryce was the remarkable pistol-shot, and he now became, even more than before, the subject of remark.

The "coal operator" it was now evident to even the roughest denizens in that town, was a good man not to "go for."

CHAPTER XIV.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

"A LUCKY shot, sir!" declared the colonel, turning to Lightning Lew.

"Fortunate for the other man, but, probably, not in the sense you mean; I *never* miss!"

"By the by, I believe you wished to talk to me this morning?" continued Lightning Lew, before the astonished look had faded from the colonel's face.

"Well, yes—I did. Suppose we adjourn to the reception-room," slowly replied the other, hardly knowing how to treat this man, who seemed inclined to treat him, Colonel Parkson, as an inferior.

Lightning Lew nodded assent to the proposition, and together they entered the room recently vacated by Sackville.

"Mr. Pryce," began the colonel, "I understand you are interested in the coal lands hereabouts, and, if you are not already bound by contract, would advise you not to purchase—at least not for some time."

"May I ask why?"

"There is no means of transportation—the river is not navigable for more than five or six weeks in the year."

"Ah! I see—thank you. I am not bound, and so can wait; but—why buy at all if that is the obstacle?"

"Well, there will be money appropriated—it is, in fact, *almost* already appropriated, to make the stream navigable for heavily loaded barges. Then, when the work is certain of successful accomplishment—then, make your contracts—buy your lands!"

"Thank you for your kindness in warning and advising me," returned Lightning Lew, adding:

"I shall be looking about me for some time to come, and will certainly not close with anybody until I have learned that the river will certainly be made navigable for getting a 'ray the coal.'"

The listener looked so gratified on hearing this that the keen-eyed detective, who was of course watching every expression of his face, decided:

"This fellow has coal lands of his own for sale. Is it some of the property now in dispute? I'll bet my badge it is."

As this was rushing through the brain of Lightning Lew, Colonel Parkson was saying:

"Will you not join me at dinner—or luncheon, Mr. Pryce?"

"No, thank you; I fear it is impossible, for Doctor Hammil and I are to lunch together, and my movements are too uncertain to make any promises after that."

It was not Lightning Lew's policy to become too intimate with the colonel, and that was his sole reason for refusing the invitation at that time.

Rather inclined to be offended at the other's careless refusal, Colonel Parkson answered:

"Very well, sir; some other time—perhaps," and, bowing stiffly, Colonel Parkson left the room.

"Getting mad, eh?" thought the detective as he followed the colonel's example, and a few minutes later, having found the doctor, sat down to luncheon.

"It's too late to go out to-day—what shall we do with ourselves?" asked Pryce, after a good repast was disposed of, and the medicine man was in especial good humor.

"Anything you please," returned the detective's accommodating company.

"Well, suppose we go to Kyle's? It's quieter, and we can there smoke and chat undisturbed."

"All right!" assented Hammil, jumping up, and both men at once started for the suspect's saloon, which the sagacious delegate from New York had "spotted" as the counterfeiters' rendezvous.

The doctor had forgotten all about the suspicions regarding Pryce's business, but the latter now had on his "working harness," and was curious to see the effect of the morning's report. Fear of the rogues he had none, and, indeed, had the time been propitious, would probably have given cause for Kyle's suspicions—"just for the fun of the thing."

At Kyle's the actions of the pair did much to confirm the saloon-keeper's suspicion, that Pryce was a detective, and to strengthen the idea that the doctor was not altogether ignorant of the fact.

The two conversed quietly, and apart from the others—Lightning Lew, being engaged in impressing upon the doctor the vastness of the work he had in hand, and the chances he (Hammil) had of getting an important position with the company, which would purchase as soon as the particular price of the coal field was fixed upon.

"But you must not talk any more to any one about what we have done, are doing, or propose to do," was Lightning Lew's constant warning.

"I am going away," he said, finally, as he arose to return to the hotel, "and when I return will be able to decide which of the several properties we have looked at will be best adapted to our purpose."

"Will you be long away, Mr. Pryce?"

"A week, probably—maybe less."

"Our business will be completed," continued Pryce, "immediately after I return."

They were just leaving the private room when he uttered the last sentence, and the words were caught by Hogue.

"A guilty conscience needs no accuser."

Hogue immediately applied Pryce's words to himself and his confederates.

"Bill, there's a-goin' t' be trouble," he whispered, as soon as Pryce and Hammil had made their exit.

"What do you mean?" sharply interrogated Kyle.

"That chap's goin' away, 'n' when he comes back our hash 'll be settled—so he said to Doc! He must be goin' after papers."

"See here, Hogue, do you know what you're talking about?" almost fiercely demanded the saloon-keeper.

"Sure—that's just w'ot he said!" stoutly asserted Hogue.

"Then you must see to it that he never leaves here! Understand, Hogue—no miss fires now! If that man is on our trail there is no time to waste. So go right after him now, and watch your chance to give it to him. That is my order. Understand?"

"Yes, I know my biz. I'll fix him!" returned the murderous wretch, as he hurried out of the saloon, to execute what was chief's command.

Lightning Lew was in terrible danger now.

The trailer was trailed!

CHAPTER XIV.

MURDER ON THE MENU.

It was about six o'clock, when Lightning Lew and Doctor Hammil left the counterfeiters' headquarters, for such it undoubtedly was.

"We will dine at the hotel, and, if you care to go back to Kyle's, afterward, we will do so?" suggested the detective.

"No—I will be glad to dine with you, Mr. Pryce, but no Bill Kyle's for me to-night."

"Just as you please," was the careless response, while the speaker was wondering:

"What's up? Have they quarreled, or has he been hearing of the counterfeit scare?"

"You see," continued the doctor (apparently deeming an explanation due to so powerful a friend), "I got clean knocked out there last night—had to be brought home, in fact, and I don't care about committing murder!"

"Murder! Why, man, what are you talking about?"

"Well—Yes, I will tell you."

"Mr. Pryce, I married a widow."

"Alone, she is all right, but there is a she-devil of a step-daughter, and—well, life is a perfect hell there, for me, and, if I should go home 'full' to-night, there would certainly be trouble—trouble whether I took my abuse quietly, or resented it."

"Whew! More luck! Another string to pull him on!"

Lightning Lew did not utter those exultant words, but he could scarcely conceal his satisfaction over thus discovering another cause for the doctor's leaving Charlestown.

"Apparently considering whether he should risk saying so much, Pryce, after a few moments' hesitation, resumed:

"Well, doctor, keep your courage up for a little while. I do not care to say too much just yet, but, you may, possibly, have an opportunity to get out of such an unpleasant situation as you appear to be in."

"Appear to be in!" echoed Hammil. "Heavens, man! you do not know what you are talking about. Show me the chance!"

"Wait!" was all the reply Lew made, but inwardly he chuckled with satisfaction that Hammil would not have to wait very long.

Nothing more passed on the subject of the doctor's home affairs, but, after dining at the hotel, the physician went home—sober for the first time in many months.

On arriving at the St. Albans, Lightning Lew had received a number of cards and memorandums, left by people who had called during his absence, relative to coal lands, asking him to call, or make an appointment for an interview.

Glancing carelessly at a few of these soon to be precious messages, the veteran detective thrust them into his pocket, remarking to the clerk, as he followed the latter into the dining-room:

"Everybody seems to know my business. I will have to hire a detective, or somebody will steal me."

He spoke jestingly, and the obsequious clerk joined in the laugh that followed.

But, true words are often spoken in jest, and Lightning Lew was soon to realize that fact.

After the doctor had gone home, the detective started out for a stroll, not caring to remain in the hotel where he ran the risk of receiving some of the coal-lands callers, while he was anxious to lay his plans for spiriting Hammil away, and for getting Forrest (his coming comrade), introduced to the Owens party.

Leaving the hotel, he turned toward the Elk River Bridge, but, absorbed in his thoughts, he did not notice that three men, who had been loitering opposite the entrance, immediately started after him.

It was now quite dark; the moon had not yet risen, and Hogue and his confederates expressed their satisfaction when they saw the direction taken by the man they were "laying for."

"We'll give him a swim, t' wash the stains off!" chuckled Hogue.

"How about smashin' him over the head—just to keep him quiet—an' then take him out to the Run?" suggested one of the others, adding:

"Might scare somethin' out o' him there, an' then put him through, all the same."

While this idea seemed to strike Hogue favorably, he hesitated about adopting it. He was leader only of that party, for that particular occasion, and so consulted the others:

"Look-a here, boys! The boss said t' see that he didn't leave here, an' to take our chance an' give it to him."

"Can't we do that easy 'nuff in the Run, after we've got all we can out of him?" argued the ruffian who had made the suggestion.

"That's so, Hogue; an' we might get somethin' important out of him, too," urged the other and hitherto silent member of the murderous gang.

"Well, let 'er go at that!" agreed the leader, adding:

"You'd better get ahead of him, Jim. I'll stay a leetle behind, an' Pate kin creep up an' smash him. If he misses—why, then, we'll be front an' back to cut him off or bear a hand. We've got him cornered now, so must do him up fer keeps!"

"That we will!" assured Pate, who was to do the "smashin'."

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE BRIDGE—A TERRIBLE TEST.

ALL unconscious of danger, and pondering over the work before him, Lightning Lew was now on the bridge, walking to the center, where he intended to stop.

"I will start for Kanawha Falls to-morrow night, or the next morning," he had just decided, when a man walked rapidly past him.

Deeply engaged in thought as he was, the experience of many years of dangerous work had rendered Lew's senses wonderfully acute, and when the man who had passed slackened his speed after gaining a position fifty yards ahead, the detective was almost instantly aware of it.

"What the dickens is that fellow loitering for, now?" he asked himself.

At the same moment impelled by a vague feeling of danger, he turned to look behind. Too late!

The ruffian deputed to strike the blow having removed his heavy boots, had stolen up so silently that when the intended victim hesitated and was about to turn, he was within a yard of him.

Then, when Lew did turn, it was to receive a crushing blow, which stretched him

senseless and bleeding upon the floor of the bridge.

"Quick, now!" ordered Hogue, and according to their previously arranged plan, the New Yorker was bound and gagged, and then, between the three, picked up and carried across the bridge.

It was pitch dark; there was nobody to question the movements of the ruffians, and even had there been one with the authority—and power to back it—to do so, the answer, "Drunk," would, in that darkness, have passed them.

But there was one thing they had not counted on: the dead weight of a man, standing over six feet, big-boned and brawny.

"Curse me for speaking of bringin' him here!" panted one—the ruffian who suggested the idea. "If I had him back on the bridge, I'd have him in—quick! That would be the end of the job."

"Drop him for a minit!"

Hogue's order was gladly obeyed, and the unfortunate detective was dropped in the roadway.

"He's as heavy as lead," remarked Pate.

"An' as limp as a 'stiff,'" added Jim.

"Well, we've only got a little way more to go, so we might as well finish it as we begun it," consoled Hogue.

"We must! Can't make no commissioner job—no suicide out o' this!" declared Pate, with a laugh that caused a shiver to run through the man on the ground.

Before his captors had actually crossed the bridge, Lew Pryce had regained consciousness, and had they neglected the apparently needless precaution of binding a man so badly hurt, there would have been some quick revolver work when he was first deposited on the roadway. Now, however, he would not have stirred if both hands and feet were free.

"The commissioner job!"

That would have been a magnet to cause him to remain apparently unconscious in order to hear more.

In response to the last remark, Hogue growled:

"Shut up, Pate! No more o' that. That's past 'n' gone, easy enough, so don't go for to rake it up—it's onlucky!"

"So! The commissioner did not commit suicide after all, eh?" thought Lightning Lew, and the detective's instinct overcoming everything else, took a sly peep at the speakers.

"It's too dark to make you out, my friend, but you will certainly find it most 'onlucky,' if I'm not done away with in a hurry."

"Who can they be? Parkson's gang?"

As the captive thus questioned himself, the marshal's warning regarding Kyle's saloon, and the counterfeiters, flashed across him.

"All right, my State Prison beauties; you have got me, now, but look out! If I slip through your fingers—it's your lives, or mine!"

"Let's get along," suggested Hogue, as these defiant thoughts were passing through the dauntless detective's mind, and even as the order was obeyed, the busy brain was planning to escape what looked like certain death.

In a short time, the trio, with their still limp, and seemingly lifeless burden, left the main road, and after a few minutes' walk along a narrow path, stepped before a small and exceedingly rude log cabin.

"Hello, Bradley!" shouted Hogue.

There was no response for a few minutes, a delay which caused the soul of Bradley, his eyes, and especially his ears, to be consigned to his satanic majesty's dominions.

At length, becoming apprehensively impatient, Hogue suggested dropping the detective and kicking in the door.

"Don't trouble yourself, Hogue!" came a hoarse voice from within, and the door was quickly opened.

"Only wanted to make sure 'twas you," continued the speaker, and as the party passed in:

"Hullo! What've ye got there?"

"None o' yer business!" savagely retorted Hogue and having placed the detective on the earthen floor of the cabin, demanded:

"Who's in the cave?"

"Gals 'n' old woman," replied Bradley, adding:

"But look here Hog—" "Shut up!" harshly interrupted the other; "shut up 'n' keep names out o' yer mouth, anyhow!"

"Hold a light!" he continued, and a small lamp being produced, looked closely at Lightning Lew's face.

"Looks like a stiff!" ejaculated Pate.

"Looks like shammin', ye mean!" retorted the leader, and dealing the helpless prisoner a brutal kick, growled:

"No shammin'! wake up 'r I'll slit yer nose!"

Lightning Lew groaned. There was little doubt that the ruffian would carry out his threat, so there was no use attempting to play unconscious much longer, even if he was willing to risk life itself in order to secure more evidence.

A harsh laugh greeted the victim's groan.

"Told ye so!" triumphantly exclaimed Hogue.

But Lew was too sharp to come to so quickly, and calmly awaited the second kick, which the impatient brute soon dealt him, before again groaning and opening his eyes.

"Now, Bradley, you git!" ordered Hogue.

"But ther' ain't no room in the cave!" protested the owner of the cabin.

"Then git out! D'ye hear me?—git!"

Grumbling and muttering curses at being turned out, Bradley obeyed—Pate closing and barring the door after him.

"Now, mister man, w'ot's yer little game?" demanded Hogue, turning to the prisoner.

Lightning Lew's gaze was roaming vacantly around the dimly-lighted room. Apparently he did not hear the question—certainly he did not heed it.

"Say, you! I'm a-talkin' t' ye! W'ot's yer little game?" was again demanded.

The question was emphasized by another kick, but the only result was a groan; the same vacant stare remained.

"He's looney! By the holy smoker, the smash on the head knocked the daylight out o' him!"

Thus spoke Jim; but the suspicious Hogue was incredulous.

"Git out! can't fool me that way!" he declared.

"Set him on that cheer," he continued; "I'll soon show ye how looney he is!"

The helpless Lew was placed in a big arm-chair—the only chair the hovel boasted; then the leader ordered the others to pile some of the loose wood lying near the open chimney around the prisoner's feet.

"Now, you've got t' talk inside of a minit, or I'll set that ere wood ablaze, 'n' if ye'r a sally-mander, an' kin stand that, w'y I'll just cut yer bloody heart out!"

Still, the same meaningless stare was the only response to this horrible threat, and with an imprecation Hogue stooped and applied a match to the well-dried wood, which instantly blazed up.

Lightning Lew had had some rough experiences as a Secret Service man, but, certainly, he was never in "warmer quarters" than at that moment.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRIENDS IN NEED.

THE fire started to blaze merrily, and, although a man of iron nerve, Lightning Lew knew that the torture would soon be so unbearable that silence would be out of question, and further deception doubtful.

Some—just a little—of the wood was green, causing considerable smoke to fill the wretched room. Fortunately, some of this smoke penetrated the cave, and, just as the helpless victim was beginning to feel uncomfortably hot, three females rushed into the room!

An instant later, Lightning Lew was rescued—from burning—at all events, for each woman seized a man, (flinging him aside like a child) and then, regardless of the danger that the thin garments in which they were clad might take fire—quickly scattered and extinguished the burning wood.

Then, turning on Hogue, the eldest of the women demanded:

"You half-starved shotes, what air yew tryin' tew dew? Burn my house?"

Mrs. Bradley, like her daughters—was a big, powerful woman—rawboned and fierce-

looking, and these men knew and feared her.

"We've got a spy there, 'n' we wuz just tryin' t' git some information out'n him—that's all," explained Hogue, very humbly, adding:

"He wuz a-playin' off 'looney'—tryin' t' fool us."

The "gals," meantime, had been looking over Lightning Lew, by the dim light of the small lamp which one of them, "Marthy," had in her hand.

Hogue had hardly finished his explanation, when the other "gal" cried:

"Looney! Good Lawd, ma, look! Pore feller! I shed think so! Look at his head—a-bleedin' like a stuck shot!"

Mrs. Bradley looked at the head, and then into the eyes of the "pore feller," and taking the lamp from Marthy, whispered:

"Yew go git my gun!"

Then, handing the lamp to the other daughter, she picked up a heavy stick and placed herself behind Lightning Lew.

"Now, yew just git!" she ordered, as Marthy reappeared, carrying a double-barreled shotgun, pointed toward the three baffled ruffians.

"But he's a spy! One o' these fellers from Washin'ton—after your old man, as well as us."

This last touched a tender spot. Old Man Bradley, as he was called, had had more than one narrow escape from the revenue and other officers, and for a moment or two the Amazon was staggered and undecided.

But she knew Hogue thoroughly, and after another glance at the blood-stained head and staring eyes of the accused, asked:

"How dew yew know he's a spy?"

"Heard him say he wuz goin' after the papers an' men, 'n' w'en he kem back next week he'd clean us out, root 'n' branch—you-uns, too!" boldly lied the ruffian.

"Bill Hog, I b'lieve you lie!" declared Mrs. Bradley, looking him square in the eye. "An', ennyhow, this a-here pore feller's plumb looney, so he won't do no harm t' ennybody."

"Sho! I tell ye, he's just a-playin' off!"

"All right, Hog! I tole yew t' git one't before; now, yew'd better dew it!"

"Hold on a minit! What's the matter with goin' through him fur proof?" interposed Jim.

There could be no objection to this, for if it were proved that their victim really was a spy, the mountain women would have lent willing assistance in hanging him.

The search was made by Jim, under the supervision of the women, who made him hand over everything taken from the pockets of the prisoner, and when finished there was quite a collection of letters and papers of various kinds, as well as a small amount of American money, and a large sum in *English sovereigns*!

The finding of the English gold—which Lightning Lew had made a point of changing at every opportunity—created something of a sensation, and the men eyed it hungrily.

"Looks as if yew wa'n't lookin' s'much for the man as the money," observed Mrs. Bradley, and noting the way the gold was being glared at, continued:

"That air gun's chuck-full o' buckshot. Marthy, keep 'em covered!"

"Oh, come! We're t' git our whack, hain't we?" protested Hogue.

"Ther' hain't a-goin' t' be enny whackin', Bill Hogue, until Nip Anderson's seen them papers. Jist writ that down!"

"I b'lieve yew were after the gold, 'n' don't b'lieve he's enny more spy 'n I am, but if Nip says them ere papers says so, then you-uns kin hev all of it."

"What's the matter wud me? I kin read!" proudly proclaimed Jim.

"So I've heerd, Jim—but we can't, 'n' so we'll wait fur Nip," firmly decided the Amazon, adding:

"I've knowed yew long 'nuff, Jim, tew know yew'r no angill. Nip'll be long in a day 'r two, 'n' then we'll know just how much yew hev been a-lyin' or playin' the highwayman."

"Git along, now! Quick, 'r I'll raise the hull Run!"

Sullenly, and with many muttered curses, the baffled ruffians filed out of the cabin, forced (by the double-barreled shotgun within, and the fact that Old Man Bradley, being

without, could quickly bring assistance to his wife) to abandon both money and vengeance.

"Lize, the second "gal," barred the door as the last of the trio passed out, and then all three women set to work dressing the prisoner's head, after which Mrs. Bradley directed Marthy to secrete the money and papers.

"For you know what dad is," she explained, "an' we mus' hev it all jest as we got it."

"Air yew a-goin' tew keep him tied up?" asked Marthy.

"Shore—for we can't tell until Nip comes but he is a spy. So git back t' bed, now. He'll be all right in the morning, I guesses."

A minute later, Lightning Lew's property being gathered up, the women retired from the room, and the prisoner was left in darkness, alone.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. "NIP'S" DECISION.

IT was nearly daylight before Lightning Lew fell asleep from sheer exhaustion. That the night was passed in thinking what he should do next morning, the reader can well surmise.

At first, he was inclined to *recover* his senses, announce himself as Mr. Lewis Pryce, coal-lands speculator, and point to the letters and cards from the well known people who had called on him to prove it.

Of course, these people could not read, but Mr. Nip Anderson would be along in a day or two and then everything would be cleared up.

But suppose there should be something—some letter, some memorandum of instructions—anything, in fact, that would give rise to even the faintest suspicion that he was a detective, among the papers taken from him?

Well he realized what would follow. No matter what his business was, the fact that he was a detective, and in that locality, coupled with Hogue's lying statement, would be sufficient to hang him!

This consideration caused him, finally, to decide that he would await Mr. Nip Anderson's declaration of his innocence before *recovering* his senses.

Accordingly, morning found Lightning Lew still "out of his head," as Marthy put it, and when breakfast was ready that young lady fed him—bacon and hominy and new milk being the bill of fare.

She had made the suggestion that his hands should be released to allow him to help himself but her mother immediately negated the idea, saying as she had not trusted one, she would not the other.

So it was at noon, and again at night—although at supper "the old man" was present—for the first time since the prisoner was brought into the house.

Bradley was short, stout and jolly—until he looked at the "spy," then his countenance became savage.

Evidently he believed the story which Hogue and his confederates had told; but Mrs. Bradley was very decidedly the "better half," so Mr. Bradley ate his bacon and hominy, without expressing his opinion of the matter.

A second morning came round again, and found Lightning Lew still staring at nothing, and Bradley (who had remained at home the previous night) became interested in, as well as impressed by, the prisoner's strange condition.

"By gum, sis, you're 'bout right!" he exclaimed, on the morning of the second day. "That fellow is plumb looney!"

"I've heern 'bout fellers hein' smashed so's some bones was knocked in, 'n' it made 'em crazy, but, by gum! this is the fu'st time I see'd one."

"D'ye gin'rally find me wrong?" asked Mrs. Bradley, rather tartly.

"No," meekly acknowledged her spouse, "I can't say as I dew."

That ended the conversation, and Bradley, on leaving, met Hogue and his confederates, who all this time had been lying in wait for Lightning Lew, determined that he should not escape them.

Being fully convinced that the prisoner was actually crazy, the old man did not fail

to impress his opinion that such was the fact upon the murderous trio.

At first all three ridiculed the idea, swore Pryce was simply shamming, and declared their intention of having him if they had to wait until doomsday.

But the old man's earnestness finally began to make an impression, and when he left them, there was a decided change of opinion—even Hogue inclining to the belief that the blow struck him *might* have so depressed Pryce's skull—or the covering of the brain—as to render him insane.

"Jim"—who could boast of being able to read—remembered hearing of a case where such a blow had caused a man to lose all recollection of the past, and this chimed in with Old Man Bradley's story.

"Well, it'll save us any more trouble—if it's so—but I'm a-goin' t' watch him for awhile afore I believe it!" declared Hogue.

"An', anyhow, I'm a-goin' t' have my whack o' that money—no matter wot he is!" he supplemented.

Bradley shook his head, as if doubting the wisdom of any man's attempting to dictate to his wife, and started up the mountain to his "work."

About noon, Mr. "Nip" Anderson presented himself at the Bradley cabin, and proved to be a lanky youth of near eighteen, who made a pretty fair living by peddling all sorts of stuff among the mountaineers.

"Nip" was a shrewd fellow, managed to ingratiate himself with the women (thus insuring the trade of the men), and had a decided liking—which he took no pains to conceal—for 'Lize Bradley.

Now, as 'Lize was the younger of the two stalwart sisters, this was rather slighting Marthy, although, as she expressed it, "she wouldn't love at sich a wishy-washy thing"—meaning, of course, Mr. "Nip"—and when the young peddler arrived and retired to the cave to show his goods, and chat with the women folks, Lightning Lew received a visit from the elder sister.

Good or bad, women are certain to sympathize with the unfortunate, but aside from this angelic characteristic of the sex, Marthy had formed a strong liking for the prisoner, because of his fine appearance and magnificent manhood.

Just what she expected to gain by it, it is impossible to surmise, but, cautiously approaching the prisoner, Marthy whispered:

"Stranger, they say you are shammin'—that you are from Washin'tin. If you air, say so, 'n' I'll help you t' get away, if yew'll promise t' let up on paw?"

The same vacant stare was the only response to Marthy's earnest words, and with a pitying look, and murmuring "pore feller!" she retired to the cave.

For a moment, Lew had thought it was a trick to entrap him, but honesty shone from the girl's eyes, and he thought:

"If there is anything compromising among those papers, I believe that girl will stand my friend, if it comes to the worst."

And, determined to trust to his "luck"—hoping that nothing compromising would be found—Lew continued to play "out of his head."

The next fifteen minutes that passed was an anxious quarter hour for the prisoner, who with every nerve strained to the highest tension, sat awaiting Mr. "Nip's" decision—his fate.

He could hear the jingling of his gold, the rustling of his papers—and each minute seemed an hour—and, then, suddenly, the suspense was ended by Mrs. Bradley, who came forth, announcing:

"Stranger, the jig's up!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RAPID RECOVERY.

LIGHTNING LEW had, in his extraordinary life experience, twice listened to his death sentence being read, and each time with the utmost composure, denying that he had been proven guilty.

Now, more experienced and hardened, it was not likely that he would give way when Mrs. Bradley uttered the ominous words—equivalent to a third death sentence.

"Stranger, the jig's up!"

When Mr. Bradley entered the cabin, the prisoner was staring at the open doorway connecting it with the cave, and with won-

derful lips parted, as if he kept his eyes fixed on the same spot—or rather in the same direction, for, apparently, he was looking right through the woman, and the others who followed her.

"Fry me fer a catfish, if *he's* foolin'!" guaranteed Mr. "Nip," who entered next after Mrs. Bradley.

"I knowed it," returned the latter, adding:

"But you can't drive nuthin' into some folks' heads!"

"Marthy! 'Lize! Cut them cords, an' make that poor feller easy!"

There was no "make believe" about the amazed stare with which Lightning Lew heard this order given, and the words which preceded it.

"Be careful about them letters of his'n, Nip," continued the woman, while her daughters were releasing the prisoner.

"I hain't like to forget it," answered the boy peddler.

"An' be shore to hurry, Nip, for them air fellers'll go 'way mad—an' we're on'y wimmen, here, you know."

"I hain't like to forget it," repeated Nip, adding:

"Reckon I'd better git, right now."

"Dew," assented Mrs. Bradley, and with a whispered word to 'Lize, Nip left the cabin.

"Hope he won't have no trouble findin' this pore feller's friends," remarked the mother, as she again barred the door.

"Oh, Nip's all right! He'll find 'em," assured 'Lize.

"Don't see how he can help it—hain't the names a'll writ down?" tartly observed Marthy.

"I don't mean jest that," explained the mother; "I mean trouble wud them Hogue fellers. They're mighty bad 'uns—all on 'em!"

"Say, maw," asked Marthy, "didn't Nip say he read sunthin'—thet a sudden shock—like a knock on the head—would just as likely's not cure him?"

"Thet's jest it: a knock on the head," returned Mrs. Bradley.

"Then, soon's he's asleep, I'm a goin' to give him a good swat right on top o' the head!" declared Marthy.

"Then I'm going right to sleep," mentally decided the conniving Lew.

He was already drowsy looking from wakefulness the previous night, and it was this that called forth Marthy's words.

"See, maw, there he goes, now!" exclaimed the girl, a few minutes later, seeing the late prisoner's head beginning to droop.

Before the mother could reply, there was thundering knocking on the door.

"Who's there?"

"Me—Hogue!" was the reply.

"Well, you, Hog—what d'ye want?"

"Want to get in."

"Well, ye won't, 'n' ef ye stand at thet door a minit longer, I'll poke a dose o' buck-shot into yel *Git* now!"

"What about that money?" demanded Hogue.

"Marthy, gimme my gun!" directed Mrs. Bradley, without replying to the question.

"Just set it ther—by the winder," she continued, as her daughter hurried out of the cave with the shotgun.

"He's gone, now—the skunk! But we'll have to look sharp, gals, fur he'll be back, shore!" warned the mother.

"What makes yew so shore o' that, maw?" inquired 'Lize.

"Cause he knows we've got that gold, an' that pop's up in the mountings, an' won't be back fur a day or two. Yew'll see—they'll come to-night, shore; so be on your guard."

Crack!

The noise sounded like the report of a small pistol, but it was only the "swat" Marthy promised to bestow on Lightning Lew's head, as soon as she caught him sleeping!

The blow was delivered with all the strength of her powerful right arm, and, as Lew was leaning forward at the time, he was knocked flat—full length—on the floor.

"Lardy! I didn't mean to hit so hard!" cried Marthy, but, as she rushed to assist the prostrate man to arise, was rewarded to see him pick himself up to a sitting posture and look around inquiringly, as if bewildered.

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"Lardy! I didn't mean to hit so hard!" cried Marthy, but, as she rushed to assist the prostrate man to arise, was rewarded to see him pick himself up to a sitting posture and look around inquiringly, as if bewildered.

He was, too, but at the strength of the "swat" he had received.

"Good Lord!" he mentally ejaculated. "That was nearly as bad as the crack I got on the bridge."

Pulling himself together, he arose to his feet and looked about him—his head still ringing from the effects of Marthy's *shocking* experiment, helping to give an air of honesty to the bewildered expression on his face.

"He's cured, mam! He's cured!" cried the delighted girl.

The detective played his part well—feeling his head, and touching the bandage in great, apparent, astonishment, as he asked:

"Where am I? What has happened me?"

Then all three took turns in informing him, and Mrs. Bradley finished with:

"Nip, he's gone to look up some o' yewr folks in town—them big folks that writ them papers—cause we 'uns had no way o' takin' keer o' ye; but yewr all right now, thank the Lawd—an' Marthy!"

"How do you mean, madame? Is it to your daughter I owe my recovery—as well as my life to you and your family?" asked the late prisoner in well dissembled astonishment.

"Oh, we 'uns didn't do more'n ennybody else 'ud do—'cept Marthy," and Mrs. Bradley went on to tell of her elder daughter's reason for administering the blow.

Lightning Lew could scarcely conceal his amusement during the recital of Marthy's brain-work, but he was really full of gratitude to the family—especially to the elder girl—and managed to preserve a grave face.

"I can never thank you sufficiently in words," he declared, when she ended the rather prolix story, "but shall endeavor to express my gratitude in more substantial shape as soon as I get back to town."

"Air yew a talkin' of money, stranger?" sharply, almost angrily, demanded Mrs. Bradley.

At that moment Lightning Lew caught the faint sound of a cautious footstep outside, accidentally betrayed by the snapping of a dry branch, and held up his hands warningly.

There was no need of the warning sign, for quick as he was, Lightning Lew was not one whit ahead of the daughter of the mountaineers.

Moving noiselessly to what appeared to be a knot hole, though really a loop hole, Mrs. Bradley peeped out, and then whipping up the gun lying against the door beside her, pushed it through and fired at once.

"That'll keep 'em quiet till dark," she declared, after listening for, but hearing no answering cry to the shot.

Then turning to Lightning Lew she continued:

"Stranger, yew hev got a quick ear."

"I should have, after doing something like guerrilla work all through the War," he smilingly explained, noting the tinge of suspicion in her tone.

Mr. "Nip" having declared that according to the papers and money, Mr. Pryce was an Englishman, the natural supposition was that he had fought on the Southern side—especially as he mentioned guerrilla warfare, and this made him doubly welcome.

"Well, well! Now, I'm shore yew'r right!" and Mrs. Bradley took both of Lew's hands in hers.

"But, what does this mean?" the New Yorker asked, in a surprised tone. "Why are those people prowling around here? What are they after?"

"Stranger, they're after yewr money. Hev yew enny weepins?"

Lightning Lew had—an elegant self-cocking six shooter, stuck down in the leg of the long, fine boot he habitually wore, and this had escaped the search.

Pulling up his trousers and producing the revolver, he exhibited the weapon to an admiring and appreciative audience.

"Good fer yew!" exclaimed Mrs. Bradley. "Yew fooled us all, an' lucky, too, fer them skunks air shore to be back after dark. So git ready fer bizness, fur we may all hev to take a hand—mean an' the gals."

"Oh, I hope not!" protested their guest. "I wouldn't like to have you *ladies* get into trouble on my account."

"Trouble? Not much! Yess—stranger,

we're used to this sort o' thing. So you jest rest easy on *that* score."

"You all are heroines!" exclaimed the detective, enthusiastically.

And the "heroines" all gathered around the flatterer admiringly.

Ladies!—heroines!

That won him three devoted defenders!

And, "artful dodger" that he was, his quick mind already had planned the further use that friendship was to be in the daring game he was now fully committed to play from that time on until the final reckoning.

CHAPTER XIX.

EDGE PUTS A SPOKE IN THE WHEEL.

EARLY in the morning of the day following the attack on the bridge, one of Pryce's callers during the previous day found that gentleman's hat on the bridge.

Crushed in and blood-stained, as it was, and having a card bearing his name stuck in the sweatband, this furnished a clue, or rather a reason, for his absence from the hotel the previous night.

Great excitement was created by this discovery, and soon the report spread throughout the town that Mr. Pryce, the English coal-lands speculator, had been murdered, and his body thrown into the river.

Bill Kyle, first to hear the news, received it with a skeptical smile, saying:

"Nonsense! He's just skipped away after playing some of the coal people."

But, inwardly, he was chuckling over what appeared to be the successful carrying out of his orders.

Doctor Hammil was late at the St. Albans that morning, having received a *very* unexpected call for his services, and was both amazed and alarmed at the report he heard, while on the way to meet Pryce at the hotel.

He was sorry, too, and sincerely so, for he had taken a great liking to Pryce, aside from the pecuniary advantages which the latter's friendship seemed to promise.

As the day passed, excitement increased—especially as several parties, who had gone out endeavoring to find some trace of the missing man, returned unsuccessful.

Robbed, murdered, and thrown into the river!

That was the general verdict at nightfall.

Next morning, the news reached Edge Sackville through a mysteriously written and equally mysteriously delivered note:

"DEAR SIR:—

"Your friend, Mr. Lewis Pryce, has disappeared, and is reported to have been murdered. His hat—blood-stained, and crushed in as if by some terrible blow—was found on the bridge yesterday morning."

There was no signature, and the note was found, as if pushed under the door, early in the morning, addressed to "Mr. Sackville."

As John was in Wheeling on business, the note was delivered to Edge, who read and reread it, hoping to find some clue to the writer, but in vain.

"It doesn't sound like a threat, or I'd think it was a 'warning' from the Parkson party," he soliloquized.

"I must get out, somehow, and see what truth there is in this report."

Then came the recollection of what he had witnessed the morning Pryce and the doctor started coal-hunting.

"By Jove! He's neglected my warning, and has been done away with by the counterfeiters!"

"This has come from—from—"

He stopped, placed the sheet of note paper to his nose, and in a moment a gleam of satisfaction lighted up his face.

"I might have known," he murmured, and, his servant entering at the moment with some coffee, ordered:

"Sam, send for Doctor Withers—quick! Then come back and help me to get into my clothes."

"Sam"—a Sackville servant of *antebellum* days—bowed and retired.

His master's will was Sam's pleasure, but he could not forbear commenting on the order:

"Good Lawd! Am he gwine for t' try t' git out?"

The question was speedily answered, for, within an hour Edge Sackville, having received a visit from the old family physician

—entered a carriage and was driven to the St. Albans.

His ribs, notwithstanding Doctor Hammil, were simply bruised, and except that his arm was in a sling, the marshal looked much as usual.

His appearance in public so soon after the injuries he had received, created much surprise, and when the carriage stopped there was a general rush to greet and congratulate the hero of the runaway on his wonderfully speedy recovery.

He was a pretty cool customer, was Edge Sackville, and with a "Thank you, gentlemen!" acknowledged the compliments paid him—or unsaid—and cut off all inquiries by calling:

"Mr. Woods, will you oblige me by riding across the bridge?"

Mr. Woods—the proprietor of the hotel—was only too happy—especially as the marshal's visits were few and far between—and inside of five minutes Sackville had a fair account of all that was known regarding Pryce's disappearance, and his movements during the evening he was last seen.

"Thank you, Mr. Woods," acknowledged Sackville when the other finished, adding:

"And, now, may I ask if you are very busy?"

"Oh, no!"

"Could you leave town for—say twenty-four hours?"

"A week—to oblige you, Mr. Sackville!"

"One day will do," returned the marshal, smiling at the other's effusiveness, and adding:

"Could you go, now—right on to the station? I can have the carriage stop to say we are going off on an excursion, and will not return until evening."

"Well—yes—I suppose so," hesitatingly assented Woods, "but you see—"

"Thank you!" interrupted Sackville, and to the driver:

"Hurry along, John! We'll just about catch that 9:30 train."

Then turning to the bewildered hotel keeper, he explained:

"You see I can't go very far, alone, and don't care for the company of most people, so I've been compelled to impose on your good nature, for I've a little business trip to make as far as Kanawha Falls."

"Oh!" exclaimed Woods, in an amusingly relieved tone, and when they were whirled up to the depot two minutes later, he appeared quite contented.

As they were about to board the train, the marshal remarked:

"We'll make this as much of an excursion as a business trip can possibly be."

Then the hotel-keeper became all smiles—and forgot to send back the message to his clerk.

CHAPTER XX.

MORE MYSTERY.

LIGHTNING LEW had informed Edge Sackville of his intention to go to Kanawha Falls to meet Forrest, and, also, of his intention with regard to placing the latter at work on the Owens's—especially John, the keeper of the County Farm.

"He must get himself into Doctor Hammil's good graces, and through him secure an introduction to John Owens," declared Lightning Lew, while speaking of his plans.

"But what will be *his* presumed business, or object in coming here?" asked Sackville.

"On, anything criminal will do," was the careless response.

"Eh? What d'ye mean?"

"Well, if he pretends to be flying from justice, that will be his best card to play for an introduction to most people—of the Owens stripe."

"You are right, by Jove!" admiringly exclaimed Sackville, adding:

"And that will be apt to make them all the more unreserved in dealing with him."

Lew nodded assent.

"You've hit it," he said, "and I'm going to Kanawha Falls just to post Bob (Forrest) as to his men, and how to manage the doctor for an introduction."

Thus it happened that, when Lightning Lew disappeared, Sackville knew enough of his plans to go on to Kanawha Falls in his

stead, which he did in the manner already described, virtually kidnapping the hotel-keeper in order that he could not go back, and inform the curious spectators who had witnessed their departure of the subject of their conversation.

Woods was talkative—the spectators inquisitive, and the result would be the warning of the counterfeiters, that the marshal was interested in the case.

By taking Woods off to Kanawha Falls with him, Sackville avoided all danger of his conversation being repeated—at all events until they returned, and possibly even then, for the hotel-keeper would probably look upon the inquiries regarding Pryce as merely an excuse to get him (Woods) to the railroad station.

"In any event, Forrest can start on the train ahead of us, and we'll have that advantage before they can get any hint of a real search for Pryce."

So reasoned Sackville, and on reaching Kanawha Falls found no difficulty in carrying out his programme.

Leaving Woods with the proprietor of the Kanawha House, in the bar of the hotel, the marshal sought Forrest, whom he found expecting Lightning Lew by the train on which he and Woods had arrived.

"Lew murdered!" exclaimed the detective in amazement, which quickly gave place to incredulity. "Nonsense!" he cried. "You couldn't kill that man with a club! He'll never die with his boots on!"

Sackville smiled but retorted:

"How about that broken, blood-stained hat?"

"That is curious," admitted Forrest, adding:

"Still that's no reason to believe he's been murdered. I'll never believe that until I see the dead body."

"Fighting" Bob they dubbed him in the Office in New York—not because he was particularly pugnacious, but because once he took a stand on any question, he seldom, if ever, relinquished it.

"Well, you'll go ahead of us on the three-thirty?" questioned Sackville.

"Yes—in fact, I think I'll go now if you've nothing more to say to me."

"No, I've told you all I know of Pryce's plans."

"All right, I'll see what there is in this, and then come in my own shape and meet the doctor."

"Good-by, then," said Sackville. "Let me hear from you soon as possible."

"I will do so—soon as I feel certain," answered Forrest, and started off to his room to make such preparations as he deemed necessary.

About five p. m., having completed his supposed business, Sackville announced his readiness to return to Charlestown, and, at seven, both stopped at the St. Albans Hotel, where Woods alighted from the former's carriage—much delighted with his excursion, and entirely forgetful of his conversation of the morning with the marshal.

The latter returned home, and then found another mysterious note, and certainly from another party.

"Ha! Threatening, eh?" muttered Sackville, as he glanced at the scrawl, which was as follows:

"Wun's gone and yew got tew look out fur yerself, if yew don't mind yer own business!"

Like the other, this note had no signature, but, unlike the other, was plainly addressed—and in much better handwriting—to "Marshal Ed Sackville."

Summoning Sam, in whom he placed implicit confidence, the marshal demanded:

"How did this note come here?"

"Dunno, sah. It wuz foun' in de hall."

"Pushed under the door?"

"No, sah—'way in de middle o' de hail."

"When?"

"Just after you went out, sah—'bout same time de bouquet come foab you."

"What are you talking about?"

"Oh, I clean forgot it, sah. A bouquet come foab you, jest when you'd gone out."

"It's in yoah own room," added Sam.

"Bouquet!" exclaimed Sackville, much surprised at receiving such a thing. "Any message with it, Sam? Who is it from?"

"That wadn't no message, sah, an' de boy

wouldn't say who sent it, so, as I knowed you'd like to know, I followed him."

"Well?" impatiently.

"Well, sah," with a sly look—"de boy went into de St. Albans, an' folks say he runs errands for Colonel Parkson—an' Miss Lydia."

"What the mischief are you grinning at?" angrily demanded Sackville.

He felt rather embarrassed himself over Sam's discovery, and catching the latter smiling significantly, was glad of an excuse to get rid of the feeling of awkwardness he was experiencing.

Frightened by his master's angry tone, Sam explained that he was smiling because of the boy's trickery in saying there was neither written nor verbal message accompanying the bouquet, and this caused him (Sam) an unnecessary journey to discover who was the sender of the flowers.

"Why do you say 'unnecessary,' Sam?" asked the marshal, struck by the word.

"Why, because if de little rascal tole de trufe and give me de letter 'stid o' droppin' it on de floah, I—"

"Do you mean to say that the boy who brought the bouquet left this letter?" sharply interrupted Sackville.

"He wuz de on'y stranger—de on'y pusion outside de folks, in de house to day."

"How do you know that, since you were out a half-hour or more?"

"'Cause when I got back 'n' found de letter, I went 'n' axed everybody in de house: 'Who left dat letter?' but nary one of 'em knowed anythin' about it—never see'd it before."

Sackville paced the floor of the hall where the note was found in troubled silence.

Sam was a confidential servant of the old-time, and if Sackville had any secrets from him, he was not himself aware of it; so he did not scruple to ask:

"How sure are you that the boy who brought the flowers is employed by Colonel Parkson?"

"Mr. Woods tole me so hisself, sah."

"Thank you!" and looking much more troubled than he had for many a day, Edge Sackville went to his room and stamped on the beautiful bouquet sent him by Lydia Parkson.

CHAPTER XXI.

FORREST AFTER HIS FRIEND.

We left Forrest at Kanawha Falls, about to start for Charlestown. Two hours later, a rough-looking—almost seedy—individual got off the train at the last-named town.

Notwithstanding his rough appearance, the new arrival had money, plenty of it, and knew how to spend it too.

The new arrival (of course it was Forrest) began business immediately, going straight from the station to the saloon on the other side of the road.

"All hands liquor up!" invited the stranger, and the loungers lined up against the bar with a promptness that indicated more than a suspicion of thirst.

Whisky makes the tongue wag—especially the tongue of the bar room bummer.

"Heard about the murder, stranger?" queried one of the loungers.

"Naw!" snarled the stranger.

And turning to the fellow who had addressed him, Forrest asked:

"What might ye call a murder in these diggin's, anyhow?"

"Why, killin' another feller, of course."

"Thought so! Now, in Texas, we sometimes call it charity—sometimes duty, but darn seldom murder. Faugh!"

"Give us another!"

"Hain't drunk the last 'un yet," observed Forrest's friend.

He was a genuine ne'er-do-well, whose sole ambition was to get drunk at least once a day. To accomplish this lofty—or rather ground and lofty—purpose, Craig was compelled to visit every saloon in and around Charlestown at least two or three times a week, and as he carried the news of one place to another, and made a point of knowing all that was going on, he was called "Reporter."

Although they had never met before, the detective sized up Craig correctly from the start. More than that, he surmised what was secretly suspected by those who had

known the fellow from childhood, namely, that a better name than "Reporter" would be "Judas."

Forrest was a physiognomist. He read "Judas" in Craig's countenance, and mentally declared:

"If this fellow knows anything, it's only a question of price."

Accordingly, pretending to be struck by the bummer's care for his interest (in pointing out that the second drink was yet to be disposed of), Forrest exclaimed:

"You're a durned good fellow to do that! I'll have to get ye to pilot me around, while I'm here."

"Certainly!" gladly agreed Craig. "Goin' to stay long?"

"Don't know, yet—I'm lookin' for a friend—but, I'll tell ye about that later."

"Come, let's leave another, and move along—I want to see if I can run across my man."

There was no objection offered to this, and after the crowd had once more partaken of the stranger's hospitality, Forrest and his guide started for the town.

As already noted, Craig was inquisitive, and they had scarcely started before he asked:

"What's your friend's name? Perhaps, I can put you on his track."

"Jimmy Johnson," repeated Craig, and for a moment Forrest feared he would be placed on the track of somebody bearing that name, but to his relief, the response was ended in the negative.

"No, I didn't s'pose you would know him," truthfully declared Forrest, adding:

"He's only here two days ahead o' me—came t' see about some property he's got."

"Ye see," he continued. "Jimmy was left some property with coal on it. Now, he's a miner, but for gold, or silver—no blasted black diamonds for him, so it's been a dead loss to him."

"Well, what's that got to do with it? Is the land in this section?" eagerly inquired Craig.

He had a sweet morsel rolling under his tongue, if it was.

"It's just where it is, and somebody sent Jimmy word that there was a stranger lookin' for that kind of land, so he started right off, and I followed as soon as I closed up our affairs."

"Was the stranger's name Pryce?" asked Craig, who had waited impatiently for Forrest to cease.

"Why, yes! Do you know him?" asked the latter, as if much surprised.

"I did know him," lied the bummer, "but that's the affair—the murder, I was goin' to tell you down at the station."

"What are you drivin' at?"

"Ju t this: a couple mornings ago, just about where we are now (on the bridge), a hat, all covered with blood and knocked out o' shape, was picked up by a man who was goin' to see this Mr. Pryce about coal lands."

"It looked as if there had been some trouble, and the man brought it into town, to turn over to the authorities."

"On the way in, the man happened to look into the hat, and there, stuck in the sweatband, was a card bearing the name of the man he was going to see—Lewis Pryce!"

Craig finished dramatically, but the story did not seem to affect Forrest, who remarked:

"Well, what of that? Any man might have another fellow's card."

"Yes, but this man, this Pryce, hasn't been seen since the night before his hat was found on the bridge; so, you see"—maliciously—"your friend will have to keep his land."

"Holy Jumpin' Jerusalem!" ejaculated Forrest, staggering back and striking his forehead with his hand, in a style which would not have caused his famous namesake to blush for the acting.

For a few seconds he acted like a lunatic; then he suddenly collapsed and clung to his companion for support.

CHAPTER XXII.

"JUDAS" SELLS HIS STORY.

"WHAT'S the matter? You're not the one who had the land to sell, are you?" asked Craig, suspiciously.

"Just as bad!" groaned Forrest.

"I loaned ten thousand dollars—think of it, stranger! Ten thousand cold dollars, on the deeds of the property to that—" here followed a torrent of abuse directed against the apocryphal Mr. Johnson.

"Well, you can get it back from him, can't you?"

"Get it back! Man, you're crazy! I see how it was: He got here the morning the hat was found, and seeing there was no hope of selling—skipped!"

"But say, stranger!" continued Forrest, earnestly, "there ain't nothing certain about this thing, is there?"

"The general opinion is that Pryce was robbed, murdered, and his body thrown into the river," was the evasive answer.

Forrest noted the emphasis, and asked:

"But, what do *you* think? Is there any sort of use hunting for this man, or waiting for him to turn up?"

Without waiting for a reply, he continued:

"Good Lord! To think of handing over that money less than a week ago!"

"I'd give a hundred—yes, five hundred dollars to see that man alive!"

Craig shot a sly glance at his excited companion, before asking:

"Why, what good would that do you? He might not buy, even if you did see him; so how could you give five hundred dollars—or even one hundred?"

"He's nibbling—he'll bite in a minute!" was the detective's hopeful mental comment.

"What good would it do? Heaps! The land's worth five times the money to them that wants it—but I don't! I'd starve—go mad—waiting for a buyer!"

"But I ain't dead broke. He left me five hundred, and I'd put up one of 'em right off to the man who'd give me a hint—something to live for—that that Pryce wasn't chucked into the river!"

"What good's a hundred—or five hundred, when ye drop ten thousand?"

Craig did not speak again for fully a minute, and Forrest's heart danced with glee.

"Now he *is* going to bite!" he thought, and rightly, for, after a minute's hesitation, Craig asked:

"Stranger, have you that hundred with you?"

"Right here!" replied Forrest, slapping his trowser's pocket, adding:

"And four hundred to follow, if I sell—as I surely will!"

"Will you put that in black and white, and put up the hundred now—to-night?"

"You bet!"

"All right! Come in here!"

They had just reached the Charlestown end of the long bridge, and the spot indicated by Craig was a small, rather poorly patronized saloon, which they entered.

"Now, fork over that hundred, and I'll tell you what I know," said Craig, after they had seated themselves.

"Not much! What kind of an insane asylum d'ye think I've escaped from?" scornfully replied Forrest.

"What d'ye mean?"

"That I'm not buyin' a pig in a bog!"

"I'll put a hundred in an envelope, with an agreement that it's yours if your information's any good—that is, if it shows that this Pryce wasn't chucked into the river."

"You can give the envelope to the owner of this place, and let him decide, if we disagree—he's probably a friend of yours, but that makes no difference."

Craig hesitated, fearing that, if they did disagree, what he was about to say would become known, but avarice overcame his fear, and he finally agreed to Forrest's proposition.

The memorandum was written, and one hundred dollars inclosed with it in an envelope, which was handed to the saloon-keeper, with the request that he would hold it for a few minutes.

"Now, fire away!" exclaimed Forrest.

"All right. Suppose you had killed and robbed a man near the center of the bridge—would you throw him into the river, or carry him to the shore to bury him?"

"If I had to do one or t'other, I'd heave him into the river—but the chances are, I'd leave him where he dropped."

Craig shook his head impatiently at the side remark, and speaking slowly, as if weighing every word, continued:

"Very good—you agree to that!"

"Well, the night Pryce disappeared, I was lying on the north side of the station—drunk in my legs, but clear-headed as I am now."

"It was about nine o'clock and, though the party passed close to me, I couldn't make 'em out, for there was no moon."

("You lie!" mentally declared Forrest, referring to the disclaimer as to recognizing the bearers of Pryce's body.)

"I supposed it was a drunk, anyhow," continued Craig, "so I paid no attention to the thing until hearing of this Pryce's disappearance next day."

With the exception above noted, Forrest believed every word of Craig's statement to be the truth.

"So, you think it was this Pryce?" the ferret asked.

"Don't you?" Craig counter-questioned, irritably, and adding:

"Can't you see it plain enough? They went for him on the bridge, knocked him senseless, and then carried him over to the Run."

"What for? What Run?"

Afraid the other was endeavoring to avoid payment of the promised reward, Craig went further than he had originally intended.

"I don't know what they done it for—maybe to get more money out of him; he's reported to be rich. Or, maybe he was interferin' with their business."

"And the Run?"

"That's a place about three miles from here—Magazine Run, they call it," explained Craig, adding:

"And now I reckon that money is mine."

"Not quite. How do I know you're not foolin' me?"

"Why, why—" began Craig, full of indignant rage.

"Bah, never mind that!" interrupted Forrest. "If you can answer one more question, I'll take the chances and fork over."

"Just where am I to look for this confounded man—this Pryce?"

"Landlord! Give us that envelope! I've lost, I reckon," added Forrest, but extended his hand, and receiving the envelope, extracted the money which he laid on the table before Craig.

The temptation was too great, and the simple way the question was put, barred all suspicion of anything more than appeared on the surface.

"Give me your word," said Craig, "swear you won't tell who told you?"

"Oh, fire away! What's the use of making such a time over nothing?" expostulated Forrest. "Don't I know it's Magazine Run, somewhere? You're only saving me the time of hunting for him."

Thus urged, and eager to grasp the money lying before him, Craig gave the much desired information, whereupon Forrest shoved over the money, and, as he started off, said:

"Be around here for a few nights. If I make my deal, I'll make you a present."

That was to keep "Judas" quiet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BOB AS A BUGABOO.

On leaving Craig, Forrest walked rapidly toward Magazine Run.

It was nearly dark, and this favored his purpose, which was to go right up to Bradley's, and ask for lodging for the night, on the plea that he was too tired to go on to Charlestown.

"I'll skirt around the house and come from the opposite direction, so that if I am seen approaching my story will look all straight."

"That fellow knows just who the men were, but is afraid to speak, but I'll find a way to coax it out of him, if I don't find Lew to-night."

"Strange that Lew, the most careful man in the business, should have so given himself away."

"Gad! It'll be sore work for those fellows, if anything has happened him! We'd have the whole blessed staff down here as soon as they could be called off their work in hand."

"Strange, too, that a man of this Parkson's caliber should run such a foolish risk."

Thus musing, the detective was soon in the vicinity of Bradley's cabin, and as it was not yet quite dark, he determined to rest a while in the woods before making the *detour* necessary to pass the house unobserved, so that he could regain the road and approach as if heading for Charlestown.

Being in no hurry, he lay musing over the various features of the case for fully half an hour after it was necessary to do so.

"Well, I might as well start," he muttered, and was slowly rising from the ground when the report of a gun, near at hand, brought him to his feet in an instant.

Following close on the report of the gun, came two pistol shots—all near at hand and in the direction of Bradley's cabin.

"What the deuce is going on?" muttered Forrest. "Perhaps they're settling one of those time-honored West Virginia feuds. If so, and Lew's with the house party, he'll be put at work."

"I must have a peep at the circus."

Moving with the caution of a Comanche stealing on an enemy, the ferret regained the edge of the road, and, having followed the direction of the shots, found himself directly facing the narrow path which had been described as leading to Bradley's cabin.

"Nearer than I imagined; but what's happened? The fun's all over, apparently."

Bang! came the report of a gun, and a bullet whistling unpleasantly close to his ear cut short Forrest's reflections, and caused him to withdraw still further into the woods, although certain that he could not have been seen from the other side of the woods.

"Pretty close shave, but that bullet didn't have my billet on it. The fun's only beginning, instead of being ended, and I must look out for stray shots."

Again his reflections were interrupted—this time by a fusillade of shots at and from the house, and then all was quiet.

For fully a half hour everything was silent—silent as if there was not a human being within miles of the spot, yet Forrest realized that one or more persons were in the vicinity, and several times caught sight of dark forms flitting among the trees bordering the other side of the road.

At length curiosity, mingled with anxiety for his friend—who might be in the house—caused the watcher to decide:

"I must get to the other side of the road. These fellows are up to extra ugly work, or they wouldn't remain quiet so long."

"But, how the deuce am I to get over? If there's any one of the attacking party on this side, I'll be plugged quicker'n lightning, while the house party'll do me the same kindness, if they can command a view of the road."

Like Lightning Lew, Forrest had been through the War, but as a scout—which was all the better for him just then, and, after a few minutes' reflection, he crept to the edge of the roadway, then laid himself full length on the ground, and making about one turn to the minute, rolled over and over until stopped by the trees on the opposite side.

After waiting and listening for two or three minutes, he drew himself in among the trees; then he got on his feet, wholly unconscious of the fact that his appearance was decidedly ghost-like.

The dry, grayish dust, lying nearly a foot thick in the roadway, had covered the New York ferret from head to foot. Even his hair looked ghostly, for he had thrust his hat into his pocket before starting across the road, and forgot to replace it.

Moving cautiously from tree to tree along the edge of the narrow path, Forrest quickly came within sight of the cabin, from view of which he kept himself shielded.

He was, in fact, between two fires—the house party would take him for one of the besiegers, while, if the latter caught a stranger among them, there would be every prospect of a fight for life.

Bradley's cabin was built right against a solid rock, in, or under which was the cave spoken of so often, and to get close to the house it was necessary to come within full view of those within.

"They're safe while powder and shot and provisions last," thought the shadower.

Just as he had arrived at this conclusion, a dark form appeared on the rock back of the house, and having carefully placed a bundle of something—just what Forrest could not make out—disappeared, but immediately returned, or was succeeded by another, also carrying a bundle, which also was laid on the roof.

Then, the truth burst upon the watcher.

"The fiends! They're going to burn them out!"

"If I were only sure Lew was in there, I'd have something to say about lighting that brushwood!"

"Yes, and I will, anyhow!"

Having decided to assist the besieged, Forrest only awaited the appearance of the one who should attempt to fire the brushwood—standing revolver in hand, dangerously close to the open space on three sides of the cabin.

Fighting Bob knew perfectly well, that what he was about to do was likely to result in his own death, for it was more than probable that there were several men lying around where he was himself standing, ready to shoot down the inmates of the cabin when driven out by the flames.

Prudence, therefore, bade him remain quiet; but, Bob was an Irishman* (he is a real character) and prudence was not one of his strongly-marked traits.

"No," he argued with prudence, "no, I can't stand this. If it was fair and open, in the daylight, I'd stay out, but I can't stand this red Indian business—"

"Ha! Here comes the skunk with the fire!"

At that moment a man carrying a blazing torch appeared on top of the rock toward the roof of the cabin, where he paused and waved the flaming signal of destruction three times round his head.

"Now, for it!" muttered Forrest, and raising his revolver, he fired.

The distance was short, and Bob's aim good, for, with a yell of pain, the torch-bearer fell.

At the same moment, in response to the waving of the torch, (which was a signal,) several men rushed toward the spot where Bob was standing.

"Well, I reckon some o' ye'll keep me company across the Styx!" grunted the detective, as, with his back planked against a tree, he awaited the onset.

But, it never came—at least, not dangerously close, for the moment the attacking party caught sight of the whitish figure, standing like a statue against the tree, there was a unanimous cry of terror, and the superstitious scoundrels fled in every direction.

"Well, now, that is funny!" observed the astonished detective. "I know beauty isn't my strong point, but I'll be hanged if I thought myself as ugly as all that!"

Still keeping under cover, Forrest hailed:

"Hello, the house! Is Pryce there?"

"What d'ye want to know for?" came the sharp voice of Mrs. Bradley.

"Cool lands!" answered Bob, with a broad grin.

"Who air yew?"

"Forrest's my maiden name!"

There was a few moments' silence, during which Bob came to the conclusion that Lightning Lew was not in the cabin, or if so, not a free agent, for he would have recognized the name.

"Though it may be, that he don't want to give away knowing me."

Just as he made this announcement, the voice of Mrs. Bradley invited:

"Come right 'long!"

"Suffering sinners! It's a female woman that's bossing this job!" ejaculated Bob, so without the least hesitation, he dashed across the open space to its door, shouting as he started to run:

"Look sharp there! I'm a-coming!"

As he spoke, the heavy door was thrown open, and, as Bob dashed in, the barrier was flung to and barred.

There was no light, but the voice of Pryce fell pleasantly upon Forrest's ear, saying:

"It's all right, Mrs. Bradley! This man has probably hit the fellow we heard firing on the roof."

"You'd have been burned out by this time if I hadn't!" explained Bob.

"Then, stranger, yew'r' more welcome than ever, for fire wuz the on'y thing that could lick us," assured Mrs. Bradley, confidently.

The Amazon was, evidently, the woman for the emergency.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE SECOND RESURRECTION.

On the morning of the second day after parting with Detective Forrest at Kanawha Falls, Edge Sackville, lying abed feverish from disregarding his doctor's advice, received the following note through the mails:

"There will be a second resurrection in a few days. I told you he could not be killed.
KANAWHA FALLS."

"By Jove! That fellow's a miracle! What a surprise it will be!" exclaimed the astonished marshal.

Five days after his (supposed) death, Mr. Lewis Pryce, coal-lands speculator, fairly astounded the good people of Charleston in general, and the guests and frequenters of the St. Albans Hotel in particular, by alighting from a carriage which had carried him from the station.

Doctor Hammil, who was among the usual crowd hanging around the hotel entrance, was the first to realize that it was the real Simon-pure Mr. Pryce, and not his ghost or Dromio.

"Great God, Mr. Pryce!" he cried (and there was sincere joy in his voice and manner). "We've been mourning you as dead for the past four or five days."

"So I learned at the station," quietly returned Pryce, adding:

"But, doctor, *you* knew I was going on business?"

"I did," admitted Hammil—rather proudly, too—"I did know you intended going away, Mr. Pryce, but—"

And then he went into all the details of the finding of the blood-stained hat.

"Well, I'm sorry for the poor fellow—especially if he was mistaken for me!"

"Why, what's his loss is our gain!" remarked one of the deeply-interested circle, which now had formed round Pryce and the doctor.

"Not at all! I'd have— Wait!" and looking round him, Lightning Lew espied a white spot on the trunk of a tree, about twenty-five yards from where he was standing.

"Gentlemen," he said, "do you see the white spot on that tree?"

All turned and looked, and then came a chorus of assenting replies.

"Very good! Now, stand aside!"

The crowd parted, and with a lightning-like movement Pryce whipped out his revolver.

Crack! Crack!

Six times, in half that many seconds, he fired; then, as he carefully wiped the smoking revolver with a silk handkerchief, he coolly challenged:

"Gentlemen, I'll wager a wine-supper for all, with any one of you, that those six bullets are all in that white spot, and all in the same hole!"

No men—not even the men of the Wild West—admire good marksmanship more than Southerners, and when Pryce produced a jack knife and asked, "Doctor, will you kindly see if I am not correct?" there was a general movement toward the tree.

Quite a crowd had been attracted by the shooting, and a general cheer went up when the doctor announced:

"Six bullets—all in the same hole!"

"Well, gentlemen, that's about what the murderers would have run against had they met me," and leaving the admiring and mystified crowd, Lightning Lew entered the hotel.

"Breakfast—anything, provided there is plenty of it—in a hurry!" he said to the clerk, as he passed on to his room.

Five minutes later, he came down stairs bareheaded, as if inviting inspection, and certainly received plenty of it.

"No, sir; there ain't even a scratch on his skull! It's as clean and white as snow."

So affirmed the waiter who served Lightning Lew, and who had received half a dol-

lar for inspecting the latter's scalp, while attending him at breakfast.

But, for the information of the reader, it may be as well to state that that waiter was totally ignorant of the possibilities of skillful wig making.

Then the doubting Thomases adjourned to the bar to discuss the matter all over again—for the twentieth time.

The news of Mr. Pryce's return spread like wildfire, and before noon visitors began to pour in on the coal-land speculator.

Pryce stood the business calls until two o'clock, received every caller politely, and promised to inspect the land offered, but at that hour declared himself through for the day.

"No more coal calls!" was the order to the clerk, as he came down to dinner; having finished which, and smoked a cigar with the hotel proprietor, he started out for a walk.

He had noticed that Doctor Hammil was not around the hotel, waiting for him, as usual, and wondering what the attraction could be, went out to look him up.

"Kyle's, if any place!" he decided, and entering that saloon, found his man engaged in conversation with Bob Forrest!

"Well, that isn't bad! Two days in town, and already acquainted with the man through whom he must get the introduction to Owens!"

That was Lightning Lew's mental comment, as, carelessly nodding to Kyle, and with an equally careless salute to the doctor, he passed to the rear of the saloon.

"Kyle looked as if he had seen a ghost," the New York Special muttered, as he sat down.

"Wonder if he is the head and front of the counterfeiting gang? Looks like it. But it don't matter; I have no time to lose about them, *now*. Only they had better light out before the Sackville-Parkson matter is cleared up—that's my opinion."

"Things are running nicely. Luck could not be better, my way!"

The approach of the doctor interrupted the musing detective, and he looked up inquiringly, rather upsetting Hammil, who confidently expected he would be heartily welcomed.

"Well, I hope we are to continue the coal-inspecting?" he said, showing he felt a little embarrassed by Pryce's cool reception.

"I don't know, doctor. I should like to go on, and have your assistance, but I don't care to have you mixing in with every Tom, Dick and Harry—in view of the position I *did* hope to secure for you."

"Why, what is wrong?" fluttered Hammil. "Do you mean that gentleman I was talking to when you came in?"

"Gentlemen?" echoed Lightning Lew with scornful emphasis.

"Well, he's a fine fellow, anyhow," humbly protested the doctor, adding:

"And he has got lots of money."

"Humph!" disdainfully ejaculated the coal speculator, and after a few minutes' silence, remarked:

"Well, I have no objection to your sharing his money, but please keep my pursuit out of your conversation."

"Order some cigars and drinks!"

The doctor promptly obeyed—showing the mastery Lightning Lew had already attained over him—and when he returned from the bar, the latter apparently unbent a little, asking:

"What's his business?"

"Well," hesitated Hammil, "it's a little confidential—"

"Then keep it to yourself!" sharply interrupted Lightning Lew.

"Oh, no! not that way. It's just this: he don't want everybody here to know."

"He's keeping shady on account of a little scrape he got into in Washington. Had to sell out his fine saloon and skip by the light of the moon, so to speak."

"Must have been a *very* little scrape," was the ironical comment.

Rather confused, the doctor blurted out Forrest's story.

"Well, he stabbed a fellow during a row in his saloon, and is waiting here until the fumes blow over. He's got to keep pretty shady, and I've just given him a letter of introduction to John Owens, who ought to be a good man for him to know."

CHAPTER XXV.

GETTING READY TO RUN.

SECURING for his secret aide the "right" kind of an introduction to John Owens, was what Lightning Lew had busied his brain about most for the preceding forty-eight hours, and now he learned that the thing was accomplished.

"Well, Bob, you are a good one!" he thought on learning this, and to the doctor suggested:

"Don't you think it's pretty risky—introducing such a character to your friends?"

"Oh, he's all right!" assured the other. "They're no angels, you can bet! He's got plenty of money to make things pleasant; and, anyhow, he's in trouble."

"Which, as I declared, would be the surest road to the favor of Mr. Owens," thought the listener.

"Yes," continued Hammil, "I am sure they'll take care of him between them all. John's brothers, you know, have farms just outside the town."

"Well, well—it's none of my business!" impatiently declared Pryce, adding:

"If you can arrange to meet me to-morrow morning at eight, we will look at some property I've been offered."

"If I remain later than eight, visitors will keep me bothered all day—and really time presses, now, doctor."

"Matters will soon come to a head."

"Of course, of course—I'll be on hand, at any hour you name at any time," promptly assured the doctor, much impressed by the information just confided to him.

"Very well—eight to-morrow will do, but *do be careful!*"

"These people are scarcely the proper thing, you know. If you are their friends, I can hardly afford to be yours—that is, if you permit too much intimacy!"

Much alarmed, the doctor declared he would act just as Mr. Pryce desired, but could not avoid protesting:

"But he's a real good fellow, and quite a gentleman, I assure you—and he's got lots of money!"

"Be on hand at eight!" directed Pryce, as if he had not heard the other; and then, relaxing his severe tone:

"Very well, come along with me—we'll take a walk across the bridge, and dine at the hotel coming back."

Hammil jumped at the offer. Five minutes before, he was afraid that all hopes of the half-promised position in the Coal Syndicate were dead. Now the sky looked clear again, and he regretted having formed the stranger's acquaintance.

Leaving the rear room and passing through the saloon, Lightning Lew looked sharply at Kyle, and noticed how the wondering look on the latter's face changed to confusion as their eyes met.

"Ah, my boy, you and I will have a bone to pick one of these days," he thought, and, for Kyle's express benefit, removed his hat—to smooth his hair.

Then again the wondering look returned to Kyle's countenance, and satisfied with the effect he had produced, Lightning Lew nodded to the saloon-keeper, and, accompanied by the doctor, started for the walk.

During the walk, Pryce continued to impress upon the doctor the necessity of keeping all matters relating to their business absolutely secret.

Returning to the hotel after a long walk, here and there through the city, as well as over the bridge, the "coal men" dined sumptuously.

All this was for effect upon the Parkson-Owens party, who would certainly hear of it, if they did not observe, the intimacy between Pryce and their confederate—as well as upon the doctor himself.

After dinner Pryce invited the doctor to his room, where they remained smoking and talking until a late hour, the host entertaining his guest with stories of the projects of the syndicate, and hinting at the probability of early necessity for a run out of town—all of which was swallowed with avidity.

"There will be no trouble about your leaving town for awhile, I suppose?" asked Pryce, as his guest was about leaving.

"No, I don't care how they like it. I'll go whenever you say."

"But, for Heaven's sake, man—you're

not going to consult *him* about it, are you?"

"Well—no, not if you say so."

"Well, I do say so! If you are going to mention it to any living soul, I'd rather—in fact, the matter must be dropped, right here!"

Thoroughly alarmed at the angry tone assumed by Pryce, the doctor swore he would not breathe a word of his intention to leave the town to any one.

Then Pryce, seemingly cooled down (?), and directed:

"Well, I'm satisfied you mean to keep your word—so, stand ready to leave at any moment."

"I'll have clothing and all other necessities ready packed in my valise."

"I'll be ready whenever you say," assured the doctor, as he departed for home.

It was then about midnight, but one and two struck before Lightning Lew retired to rest.

"Well, the doctor's safe—if I can keep his mouth shut for a few days; Bob's sure to get on intimate terms with Owens, and that leaves nothing but the murder of the commissioner to unravel."

"Yes, Mr. Hogue, you were right—that *was* an unlucky remark your friend made, and it will cause you to pay dearly for this little token of your regard!"

As he finished—he was uttering his thoughts aloud—Lew removed the wig he had worn all day, revealing a shaven head, and an ugly wound—crossed and re-crossed with strips of court plaster.

"To-morrow night we'll look up Mr. Hogue," muttered the vengeful detective, as he turned out the light.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE COLONEL BECOMES SUSPICIOUS.

ON the morning after his unexpected return to Charleston, Lightning Lew and the doctor met as agreed, and after a hasty breakfast started off with the black bag.

As usual, there were more or less remarks regarding the intimacy between the two men, and standing one side Colonel Parkson was an attentive listener to all that was being said.

There was nothing particularly strange about these remarks, for the doctor was not regarded as a very respectable character, and that a man like Mr. Pryce should make a friend of him—an intimate one, apparently—was cause enough for remark.

John Owens, too, was an attentive listener to the jesting remarks of the guests, and hotel loungers.

"Some fine morning, we'll wake up to find 'Doc' a capitalist," laughed one.

"Well, you may laugh at him now, but, by Jove, that Pryce isn't carrying him around, and wining and dining him for fun," seriously remarked another.

"No, it's for coal, I understand," dryly put in a third.

And so the remarks were bandied about, until one man quietly observed:

"Well, gentlemen, I suppose it's all right, but it strikes me as darn queer that instead of rushing round with Doctor Hammil, (who don't know as much about coal as the pig does about preaching,) this Mr. Pryce don't hire a mining expert—that is, if it *is* coal he's after!"

This was a very pertinent remark, and each wondered that it had not occurred to him before.

Parkson and Owens exchanged significant glances, and the former said:

"Well, John? Got something to say to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well—come up-stairs."

As soon as they were in the colonel's room, Parkson asked:

"What do you think of this Pryce, John?"

"Can't make him out at all, sir. Doctor swears it's coal, and nothing but coal."

"What do you think, then, of that last remark?"

"It was a pretty shrewd one, sir—struck right home, seems to me."

"Just so. This intimacy should have been ripped in the bud."

"Well, colonel, you know how I acted in the beginning; but when doctor swore it

was coal business—and I saw the samples myself, I didn't feel like depriving him of the five dollars a day."

"Yes, yes, that's well enough! But, if this man *is* after coal why not hire an expert?"

"If he is not after coal, there can be but one object in his becoming so intimate with Hammil?"

Owens nodded, and the colonel continued: "Therefore, this man must be watched, the doctor pumped regularly, and the moment his reports disagree, notify me."

"There is too much at stake to trust to chance in anything, but I don't, as you say, like to take away the five dollars a day."

"I'll look out that he's pumped dry, colonel," answered Owens, assuringly.

"See that you do it carefully."

"And now, John, there's another intimacy to talk about—one which your father to look after was the cause of my sending for you."

John Owens was a rough fellow, full of brutal courage, the very opposite of Doctor Hammil, but he, too, had a wholesome dread of the colonel, and he looked at the latter in alarmed surprise.

"Yes," quietly, smoothly, but all the time hiddenly menacing. "Yes, you failed to inform me that my daughter and Sackville had renewed their intimacy, which I believed was ended forever."

"I can't believe—that is, I don't understand how it can be, sir," stammered Owens, adding:

"The boy I recommended to you reports to me regularly everywhere he is sent by Miss Parkson, and Julie, the maid, watches all letters sent and received, and follows whenever her mistress goes out—except she knows it's merely to make a call on some lady friend."

"Nevertheless, they walked across the bridge a little after sunset, one evening last week," coldly returned the colonel.

"It must have been an accidental meeting, sir. I'd have heard of it sure if it wasn't."

"Perhaps. However, the thing's past, and accidental, or otherwise, you failed to hear of it. Be more careful, or rather, make your people be so."

"If I could appear in the matter, I would teach them not to make another such blunder."

Feeling that this applied as much to himself as to his *tools*—and that it was intended to—Owens remained silent, while the colonel continued:

"That is all, I believe, John— Stay!"

"Are you sure you can trust that boy?"

"I'd bet my life on him!"

"And lose it. Don't risk such an important affair as that on so slender a chance—certainly none of mine."

"Well, I've tested him several times since he's been here, and many times before, and never found him at fault," stoutly asserted the confidential tool.

"Well, it may be all right, it maybe—but I scent trouble—danger!"

"Who can it be? Is it this Pryce, or the doctor, or the boy—or all three?"

Whether intentionally or not, Colonel Parkson appeared to be thinking aloud, and Owens did not deem it safe to interrupt him by replying.

Slowly pacing the floor of his elegantly furnished room, the colonel continued:

"Everybody must be watched—especially those three. I'll have my own man look to that—and first to that boy."

Then, as if suddenly becoming conscious that he was not alone, Parkson exclaimed:

"Really, I've been forgetting you, John!"

"And, myself, too, I fear," he added, smilingly, but looking searchingly at his tool.

Hardly knowing what response to make, Owens contented himself with smiling deprecatingly, and his master continued:

"Well, let me hear from you the moment you have anything to report, no matter how unimportant it may appear to be—to you."

Taking this as a signal to leave, Owens departed, assuring the colonel that he would obey his orders to the letter.

During almost the entire conversation of Parkson and Owens, a mulatto boy knelt at the door of the room, with his ear glued to the key hole, drinking in every word.

He was a bright-looking youth of sixteen, (and was really very intelligent,) and when

Owens departed through one door, he arose from the other, muttering:

"All right, colonel! Evil be to him who evil thinks."

"So, you're going to watch that boy, are you? Now, suppose that boy does a little watching on his own account, and finds a market for what he knows?"

"Let me see," going into the adjoining room, the youth sat down and soon became buried in thought, from which he was aroused by the entrance of Miss Parkson.

"Why, Pete, what is the matter?" she asked, surprised at the thoughtful attitude and expression of the youth's countenance.

"Nothing, miss! I was only thinking," replied the youth.

"Papa has not been scolding you, I hope?"

"No, miss"—and, then, as if coming to a sudden resolution, Pete continued:

"Miss Parkson, there is something I'd like to tell you, but don't dare do it, now."

"If you'll send Julie out, and call for me—when the colonel goes out I will do it."

The youth had spoken in a very low tone—almost a whisper—and after gazing at him in questioning surprise for a few moments, Miss Parkson nodded assentingly as she glided silently back to her own room.

"Yes, I'll do it! Then, Mister Colonel, we'll see who comes off second best!"

"Edge Sackville'll pay well for what I can tell him—if Miss Lydia will allow me—and, anyhow, I'm sick of playing the sneak—spying on such a fine man, and good, beautiful woman!"

Thus mused "Pete" when his young mistress had left the room, and patiently awaited the expected summons.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FORREST FURNISHES HIS OWN INTRODUCTION.

LIGHTNING LEW and his guide returned from their second day's coal-lands inspection in better condition than the first had left them.

They had visited several of those who had called on Mr. Pryce to offer him their property, but had used horses wherever possible, and accordingly, after washing and eating, felt in condition to visit Kyle's. Lightning Lew's excuse was to avoid callers; Doctor Hammil needed no excuse, he was Mr. Pryce's "friend!"—to quote his proud way of asserting what was now a generally-accepted fact.

Lew's real reasons were, first, to worry Kyle, and second, to meet Forrest, who he expected would make that saloon his headquarters.

Incidentally, Lew meant to keep an eye out for Mr. Hogue and his confederates.

On entering Kyle's, Pryce was fairly astonished to find Forrest, and the whole Owens family, with the proprietor, and two others, all talking together in the most friendly fashion.

John Owens, eyed the new-comers suspiciously, but one of the others—the magistrate—exclaimed:

"Hello! Talk of the—you know the rest!"

"Come, Doc, old boy!"

For the first time in many years, Hammil hung fire on an invitation to drink.

Mistaking the reason, the magistrate continued:

"That's all right, Doc! Your friend's included, of course—introduce him."

The speaker had just returned to Charleston that morning, and had not even heard of Mr. Lewis Pryce, the representative of the English Coal Syndicate.

With an appealing look at Lightning Lew, Hammil complied with the request to introduce "his friend," and to all but "Mr. Crowley"—Forrest's new name—Mr. Pryce acted very politely.

"He's really the best of the crowd; please don't treat him badly," whispered the doctor at the first opportunity—referring to Forrest, and Lew's coolness toward the "man from Washington."

But Mr. Pryce refused to be gracious to Crowley, and the latter complained of the haughty manner in which the Englishman treated him.

"Oh, don't mind him! You're just as good and a little better, perhaps, than he is," consoled Magistrate Owens.

"And we'll see you through on that other little matter," added John Owens.

Although apparently deeply engaged with Doctor Hammil, Lightning Lew heard every word of this, and although much amused was also much surprised at Forrest's ease and quickness in making friends of the entire Owens family.

"By Jove, I'm the manufactured article—Bob's a born detective!" he said to himself.

"But trust an Irishman for scraping acquaintance where it's necessary or profitable."

Soon the party broke up, all going out except John.

"I'm going to call on Colonel Parkson," explained the latter to Forrest. "If you like, you can ride out to the Farm with me."

"I think you'll like it," he added, "but at any rate, it will be no harm to try us."

"We'll do our best, and you're welcome to all we've got."

Forrest—or Crowley—was profuse in his expressions of thanks, and gladly agreed to try the Farm.

"All right," said Owens, "I'll call for you in an hour or two."

Then he, too, left the saloon, and Lightning Lew, sitting with the doctor in the rear, saw Kyle and Crowley engaged in earnest conversation.

At the expiration of an hour, John Owens returned, and a few minutes after he and Mr. Crowley drove away to the County Farm.

"Well, I fancy it's time for us to make a move, also," remarked Lightning Lew, when the last of the Owens party having left him, the saloon-keeper came toward the rear to see what was going on there.

"What! Going already?" asked Kyle. Wait a few minutes and let me bring you a cigar.

But Mr. Pryce was obdurate.

"Another time," he said, "we've got some business to do before dinner, and"—pulling out a magnificent watch—"it's now nearly six. So, we have no time to lose."

"Hang you and your business!" muttered the counterfeit saloon-keeper.

"I wish I felt certain of what you really are!"

"It can't be possible there was any mistake—made the other night—and yet he's back safe and sound!"

"Confound him! Who and what is he?"

"I don't like this quietness about the bridge business—the fools should have pitched him into the river!"

"Well, the only thing to do now, is watch the pair of them, for hang me, if the doctor don't seem bewitched!"

"That fellow, the Reporter, would be just the one to keep an eye on them."

"I must see him to-morrow."

Thus thought and planned Kyle, as he mused over the events of the last few days.

Lightning Lew and the doctor, meantime, had gone straight to the St. Albans, the former having decided, immediately after leaving Kyle's, that the "business" could wait until next morning.

The "business" plea was, of course, a mere pretense, very transparent, and meant to be so—it would worry Kyle.

Again, Pryce ordered that everything should be served that good-taste, and epicurean experience could suggest—astonishing guests, waiters, cook, and proprietor, by the magnificent disregard of expense which he displayed.

The meal occupied fully two hours, and even then Pryce seemed disposed to linger over the wine and cigars, but as if suddenly changing his mind, exclaimed:

"No—I'll go take a tramp about for an hour or two. What say you, doctor?"

"We can smoke, walk and talk at the same time."

The doctor was of course agreeable; Pryce's will had become his pleasure, and a few minutes after they were leisurely strolling toward the bridge.

Nothing has been said of what passed when Lightning Lew and Lightning Bob met at the Bradley log cabin, nor is it necessary to say more, at present, than that the latter played out his part, but at the first opportunity informed his superior of what he had worked out of Craig—where and how, and the latter's character.

On his side, Lew astonished Forrest by revealing what he had heard while supposed to be unconscious.

"Then by the piper that played before Moses, we'll bag the whole lot of 'em!" declared Bob, adding:

"D'y'e suppose there's any connection between the two parties—the Parkson-Owens combination and the counterfeiters?"

"No, I don't think there is. Parkson's hardly the kind of a man for that, though of course he might have used them through others."

"In any event," continued Lew, "there's only the murder now to plan for and I can manage that, if you'll look after the Owens crowd."

"That'll be merely a question of time," assured Forrest.

It was in this way Lightning Lew learned of Craig, and where to look for him.

The walk with the doctor was merely a blind—to prevent "Judas" from suspecting anything when they entered the little saloon near the bridge.

Lew did not intend to attempt any "business" in his assumed character of coal-lands speculator. He merely wished to "size up" his man.

After crossing the bridge, they stepped into a saloon just at the other end.

This saloon, too, had a rear room, and immediately after entering the place the detective heard voices there—one of which sounded familiar.

"Wait a moment," he said to Hammil, "I think there's somebody back here, whom I know."

The room formed a kind of an L, and a person approaching could not be seen until he was actually entering the door.

Walking softly, Lightning Lew approached unnoticed, as was evidenced by what he heard when near the door.

"Now, look a-heck. Craig—you be keefful! You're liable to go off any minit, for I don't trust ye and I'll see that others don't!"

There was no response to these threatening words, and the speaker continued:

"You *will* keep a-talkin', an' you'll not stop until you're choked off for good. I've warned one't afore—this is the last time, an' I won't swear you're safe now!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANOTHER STORY FOR SALE.

THERE was a moving of chairs after the last threatening words, and returning to the bar, Lightning Lew paid for what had been ordered, leaving the place just as several men came from the rear.

He had recognized the voice of the man threatening Craig, as Hogue's, and on getting a short distance from the saloon stopped and asked:

"Doctor do you know a fellow named Craig? He's better known as Reporter, I understand because he knows everybody and all about what's going on."

"Oh, yes; everybody knows Craig."

"Well, doctor, I'd like to meet that fellow, because there are certain inquiries I wish to make. Would you object to making a hunt for him?"

"Certainly not, sir! I shall be only too happy to do anything you wish."

"Thank you!"

"Now, suppose you take this five dollars and begin your search right where we have just left. Continue until you find him, and when you do—"

All this was merely to gain time—to keep within sight of the saloon until Hogue left, and just at this point Lightning Lew stopped short, having seen Hogue come out and go toward the bridge.

"Well, what shall I do when I meet him?" asked Hammil.

"It's not fair to ask you to do such work, and you can do something more fitting."

"I'm expecting some people at the hotel. You can receive them, and explain that I will not be home until late."

This was tickling the doctor's—"My friend, Mr. Pryce!" to an extraordinary extent, and Hammil could hardly restrain his impatience when Lightning Lew added:

"Of course, you will receive them in my room. You will kindly act as my representative."

A half minute later, the doctor was hastering at top-speed toward the St. Albans, while Lightning Lew, in a more leisurely fashion returned to the saloon.

One glance revealed that Craig must have remained in the rear room, when the detective lighted a cigar and sauntered back.

As expected, Craig *was* in the rear, and when Lew entered started up, as if about to leave.

"Hold on, stranger!" called the detective.

"Don't let me disturb you—take a cigar."

This was attacking "Judas" in his weakest spot, and with a muttered, "Thank ye!" he declared in favor of whisky.

After making a few remarks (during which he alluded to his being a stranger in town), the detective asked:

"Are you pretty well acquainted in this vicinity?"

At another time this would have caused Craig to smile. Now, however, he was a threatened man—and threatened, too, by men who did not usually delay long in doing what they threatened—and his answer was a rather pre-occupied one.

"Yes—pretty well."

"Glad to hear it—especially here, for I was going to ask the proprietor; but didn't like to talk of other people's business—though this is the place I was to find him."

This mixed-up, mysterious and incomprehensible statement caused Craig to stare at the speaker and ask:

"Find who?"

"A gentleman of the name of Craig."

"What d'y'e want of him?"

Half curious, half fearful, "Judas" asked the question with as much carelessness as he could assume, but there was no pretense about the amazed joy with which he received the answer.

"Well, the fact is, stranger, he did a business friend of mine a favor, and in doing it did me a much greater favor."

"My friend intrusted me with something for this Craig, and I myself should and will add a little to it."

"Who are you?" bluntly demanded Craig.

"My name is Pryce, and—Excuse me, but are you a friend of Mr. Craig's?"

"I am."

"All right, then, I can tell you."

"I not only have something to give Mr. Craig, but, what is more important, something to tell him—something very important. That's why I'm anxious to find him—the money could wait."

"Eh? Say, Mr. Pryce, I'm Mr. Craig. Are you the English coal spec?"

"I am the English coal speculator, as you term me, but I—"

"Really, you'll have to pardon my doubting you, but I must have some proof of your being Mr. Craig before going any further."

Mr. Pryce, apparently, was much embarrassed, as well as excited, and "Judas" smiled, notwithstanding the threatening language still ringing in his ears.

"That's easy enough," he smilingly replied. "Just call the landlord, and ask him my name."

He was beginning to think that the sending of the stranger, with the coal-lands to sell, to Bradley's, was not such a poor speculation, after all—even if he was placed in a dangerous position by so doing.

"If I get another hundred," thought he, "I can light out—go North or West—anywhere I please."

Lightning Lew called the landlord, as suggested, and that worthy promptly certified to the fact that Mr. Craig was not lying in claiming that name.

"Thank you," returned Lew, and to "Judas":

"It was absolutely necessary that I should be sure of my man, because, first, I've a few dollars in trust for you, and second, I've something of importance to tell you—vital importance."

"I am indebted to your telling Mr. Forrest for, perhaps, my life—certainly, for a considerable sum of money."

"Now, Mr. Forrest informs me that he is to give you four hundred dollars on the consummation of a purpose, which I will certainly make from him within a few weeks, and if you desire it, you can have some on account, say twenty-five dollars?"

"I do desire it!" eagerly exclaimed Craig,

and then, remembering the promised information, asked for it.

"Well, it's just this," began Lightning Lew, and then paused to count out the twenty-five dollars.

"There! That's about what you want."

"But, what was it you were going to tell me?"

After studying the countenance of his companion, as if to ascertain if he was worthy of trust, but really to determine how much he was already scared, Lightning Lew, in a very deliberate way, asked:

"Mr. Craig, if I tell you something which concerns you very much, will you keep it a secret?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Well, as you know, I was attacked and knocked senseless on the bridge.

I came to while I was being carried to Magazine Run, and overheard some conversation, when they got tired and laid me down to rest.

"That conversation concerns you very much, but before I repeat it, I must ask you some questions."

Craig, full of anxious uncertainty, could not endure the suspense, and when Lew paused to call:

"Landlord! another drink, if you please!" urged.

"Go on! Don't mind the drinks!"

"Good! you're just about in right condition," thought the torturing detective.

He had no pity for Craig, no scruples about his fears, or torturing him in any way by which he could attain his object—no more than he had of deceiving any other criminal, in order to commit him—for he looked upon Craig as a criminal.

Pausing as if to frame the question—and thus deliberately torturing "Judas"—he asked:

"Do—you know a man of the name of Hogre?"

"Yes"—with a shudder.

"Do—you—also, know a man of the name of Pate?"

"Yes, yes! For God's sake, man, what are you driving at?" cried Craig.

"Well, I don't know exactly—perhaps you will better understand what I overheard than I can—for I can only make out that you are to be accused of the murder of a *United States Commissioner*."

"Me?" cried Craig.

"Yes—so I gathered from their conversation."

"But how can that be? It's impossible!"

"Perhaps so. At all events, in return for the kindness done me, I thought it my duty to warn you of their plot."

"You must be mistaken!"

"They would not be so crazy as to revive that case!" declared Craig, but beads of perspiration were standing on his brow—and not because of the heat either.

"Of course you know better than I," calmly admitted Lightning Lew, adding:

"But it seems they think you have injured them in some way, and intend to have you hanged for the murder of the Commissioner by way of punishment!"

Craig laughed on hearing this—hysterically.

"Why, I could have hanged the whole lot of 'em long ago!" he declared.

"Only there was nothing to gain, and you were afraid of the vengeance of their friends," supplemented Lew—but not aloud.

Aloud he advised:

"If that be so, you are safe, for you can forestall them, by telling your story."

"Who would be the official to consult in the matter—in order to save your own neck?"

"Edge Sackville—the United States marshal, is the man most interested," replied Craig, in a tone which told that he was not conscious of the importance of what he was saying.

"Well, why not go, and see this man?" suggested Lightning Lew.

"You take a great deal of interest in me—or this matter," remarked Craig, looking sharply at the detective.

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand you—we—English—are rather dull, you know," coolly returned Mr. Pryce, adding:

"If you refer to my taking the trouble to advance you twenty-five dollars and then warn you that your neck is in danger, I can

only say that having done that, I consider we are quits.

"I never forget a good turn, and you saved my life—or pretty near it—a few days since."

This speech, delivered in Lew's most impressive tone—and he could be very impressive when necessary—had a wonderful effect on "Judas."

"I will—yes, I'll do it!" he muttered, and turning to his adviser, declared:

"I'm going to do as you suggest—see Edge Sackville. Outside of the people who did the trick, I alone can tell who killed the Commissioner!"

"I should not lose any time about it," warned Pryce.

"I won't—I'll tell him all about it tomorrow," returned Craig.

"No you won't! You'll be dead—tomorrow!" muttered the saloon keeper, who had listened to the latter part of the conversation, and who quietly moved away when he heard Lightning Lew say:

"Well, I've done what I could—now, I must be off."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"JUDAS" DOES NOT COMMIT SUICIDE.

LEAVING Craig apparently fully resolved to make a clean breast of it, Lightning Lew returned to the hotel, where he found the doctor awaiting him.

"We have had no callers," reported Hammil, in a rather disappointed tone, "but here are some letters for you."

Running carelessly through the half-dozen missives, Lightning Lew was somewhat astonished to find the following from Edge Sackville:

"Be careful of yourself. I've received a warning (which I have ascertained came through the Parkson party) from the people who attacked you on the bridge."

If Lightning Lew was astonished at this, the feeling was not lessened by the following, in female chirography:

"Please be careful of yourself, as it is thought that you are not what you seem to be, and some people fear you will interfere in some way, which I do not quite understand, with their plans."

"Also, kindly warn Mr. Edge Sackville not to come near the hotel, and to be very careful of himself."

"I cannot sign my name, but believe me I am

YOUR FRIEND."

"Well, I'll be switched!" exclaimed Lew, after reading the second warning.

"Eh? What's wrong?" asked the attentive doctor, not perceiving that his companion was, in that instance, committing what he would himself consider an unpardonable sin—thinking aloud.

The doctor's words recalled the detective, and he smilingly answered:

"I've read a queer letter, but, being marked 'confidential,' we'll not talk about it."

"I've also received a hint that my presence in New York, and that of somebody who knows this part of the country, may be desirable at any moment."

"Look here, Doc! I don't care to keep you too much in the dark, but neither can I say a great deal. However, I'll just ask you this:

"How would you like to be secretary of a big company, at a fat salary?"

The doctor gasped his astonishment.

"Me secretary of your company?" he asked.

"There is no company yet," answered Pryce; "I've merely asked you because somebody who knows this place, and the people, must be secretary, if a company is formed."

"Moreover, I must tell you that the company is liable to be formed at any time, and you must not only hold your tongue, but be prepared—that is, willing to accompany me to New York, at very short notice."

"Any time, any time!" answered Hammil, hardly able to control his delight at the prospect of being "secretary of a big company, at a fat salary."

Detective Pryce now felt sure of the end of his case. Hammil would certainly accompany him wherever he wanted to go.

This would alarm the Parkson party, and give Forrest—or, as they knew him, Mr. Crowley—an opportunity to work on their fears.

Craig, to save himself, would go to Edge Sackville and reveal what he knew of the murder of the United States Commissioner.

"The fellow will himself be glad to get away—once he has made a confession," thought Lew, "and therefore Sackville will have no difficulty in transferring him to some safe place—Washington, for instance."

"But—by Jove! I had not thought of that! The marshal is confined to the house, and will probably see nobody on business!"

"I must look after that fellow first thing in the morning—though I suspect that he'll force his way to Sackville, if necessary, for he is thoroughly frightened."

Having arrived at this conclusion, Lew retired and soon was sound asleep—not even dreaming of the disappointment in store for him.

When he came down to breakfast next morning Mr. Pryce found everybody talking excitedly, and some half-fearfully, about a mysterious murder which had been committed during the previous night.

"I saw him myself, lying right in front of the marshal's house—in fact, at the foot of the stoop of the marshal's house," declared one of an excited group, talking of the murder.

The word "marshal" caught the quick detective ear, and drawing nearer, Lew heard:

"And you say there was a card on him, Simmons?"

"Yes, and I read it!"

"What was on it?"

"Fair warning:

"This is a sample, Mr. Marshal Sackville, of what you'll get yourself, if you're not careful!"

"Don't bother protecting other people—especially English speculators." That's what it read."

Notwithstanding the excitement, Pryce had not approached unnoticed, and all eyes were now turned on him.

"By all that's good, that seems to be a hit at your humble servant!" declared Lightning Lew! "But what's all this excitement about? I hear you talking about cards, and warnings—what is it?"

Only too happy to find a fresh market for his story, Simmons answered:

"Why, it's about a man whom all we people know, (though he didn't amount to a great deal,) who was found killed on Marshal Sackville's stoop this morning, and the card you heard spoken of was found pinned on his breast."

"You saw it?"

"I did!"

"Who was the man?"

Even before the answer came, Lew had a suspicion of the truth.

"There's a break in the luck!" he thought. "It was too good to last. Craig has been killed, as sure as shooting!"

"It was a man we called the Reporter," Simmons answered in return to the last interrogatory; "his real name was Craig."

"I don't know that anybody will grieve over him, but the fact of the murder itself, and the queer warning to the marshal of what he'll get, is a mystery."

"It is strange," commented Mr. Pryce, "and stranger, still, that I should be mixed up in it. There are no other English speculators here, I believe," he added, half-jokingly.

"No," returned the plain-spoken man who had suggested that if really after coal, Mr. Pryce should employ an expert, "there are no others, and will be none at all if you're not mighty careful."

"It looks as if the mountain-men thought you were looking for counterfeiters, instead of coal!"

"Hang me if I can see any reason for that!" declared Mr. Pryce. "Coal is worth something—to me, but what counterfeiters are worth is a mystery."

"However, I'll be on guard, as well as Mr. —what—d'ye—call—him—the marshal, and may the Lord pity the counterfeiter that interferes with me, or my work."

All the savage in his nature aroused

Lightning Lew spoke in a tone which astonished his audience because of its fierceness.

Paying no heed to the questioning, astonished looks of the bystanders, Mr. Pryce turned and entered the dining-room.

A few minutes later Dr. Hammil reached the hotel, and had just heard Mr. Simmons finish his story for the twentieth time, when Lightning Lew, having finished breakfast, came forth.

He was in a bad mood—bad for the counterfeiters—bad for everybody to whom he was opposed.

"Hello, doctor! You're just in time to hear some news," he exclaimed, and there was anger in his voice.

"We're not to go prospecting any more—you and I! The counterfeiters have forbidden it!"

"But, by the great Eternal!" he added, "I'll go—go as long as I like, and where I like! Such infernal scoundrels will not deter me from doing what I am here to do."

The audience listened in bewildered, admiring astonishment.

CHAPTER XXX.

PREPARING FOR HOGUE.

IMMEDIATELY after this declaration of defiance, Lightning Lew returned to his apartments and sent for Hammil.

"Doctor!" he said, "will you kindly go and find out if Mr. Sackville is at all capable of leaving his room, or of giving me any protection?"

"I intend, at all hazards, to prosecute my work, the threats of these scoundrels to the contrary notwithstanding."

Without a word, as if fearful of making comment one way or the other, the doctor departed, and Lightning Lew began to pace the floor.

"I am between a double fire. The counterfeiters evidently will believe I am here on *their* business; while the Parkson-Owens party are also suspicious of me."

"Just now I must go for this fellow Hogue. I believe I can force the story of the murder of the commissioner out of him. With what I have learned from Craig, I ought to be able to put on the screws tight enough to squeeze the truth out of Hogue."

"He's a thorough-paced scoundrel, and, I am sure, an arrant coward. If I can only get him alone and have one half-hour with him, I think I can drag the story out of him."

"If Sackville were well, I would ask his assistance, but, as it is, I fear I shall have to go it alone. I'll wait, however, until the Doc returns. He may bring some information which will aid me, and I will then start out for Mr. Hogue."

Having come to this decision, Lew sat down. He was greatly excited, and in the defiant language he had used previously did not begin to express what he felt, he was so thoroughly aroused.

"Ah, if I had but time, I'd give you gentry something to think about—something to occupy your time, in place of writing threatening letters! Blast the villains! I'll be the avenging angel for some of them, before I'm through!"

Had the shadowed men known their man, they would have regretted this rousing of the sleeping lion.

After an hour's absence, Doctor Hammil returned from visiting Edge Sackville.

"The marshal is unable to leave the house," reported the doctor, "but he sends you this letter, which, he says, calls upon all law-abiding citizens to assist you against these people who are threatening you."

Lightning Lew understood at once that the letter contained something entirely different to what the doctor stated, and fully believed.

"Very good! Awfully obliged to you, doctor!" he said, then adding:

"But it does seem queer that, in a civilized country, a man cannot attend to his own business without being interfered with by a parcel of throat-cutting stab-in-the-back scoundrels, doesn't it?"

"Yes," timidly agreed Hammil.

"And still queerer that, when a man is interfered with, he can be afforded no real protection."

"Yes!" promptly coincided the doctor.

The language of his friend premised

trouble for Marshal Sackville, but when Lightning Lew announced that he was going next morning to look at some property in the mountain district, the doctor's courageous wrath against Edge Sackville vanished.

"The marshal knows these people," he declared, "and there's no use of one, or two, trying to buck against them. If I were you, I would not go; it's too dangerous! They've made a dead set at you, evidently believing—"

"By Jove! Mr. Pryce, until this moment I forgot all about it, but, just before you were supposed to have been killed, I know you were mistaken for a detective—a Secret Service man."

"Gad! That would not be a very strange error," thought Lightning Lew; while aloud he responded:

"Well, I'm obliged to you, doctor, but cannot see how I'm responsible for these people's mistakes. Go, I will! But, mark my words, doctor, every man who survives the result of an attack on me will have good cause to regret he was not killed!"

"But, you will not attempt such a thing alone? It's suicide!" expostulated the doctor, now thoroughly alarmed.

"I shall—and at once!" was the firm reply. "But, I do not ask, and cannot expect you to share my danger. If anything happens me, you will find among my papers letters from General Littlefield, and others, to whom you will kindly forward the intelligence."

This was clinching the doctor's bonds—rendering him even more confident than before that Lightning Lew was his friend, and one with power to promote his (Hammil's) interests.

"I will do as you direct," he answered, "but, really, you should not invite an attack by starting to-day. Wait a few days—until it becomes more widely known and firmly established, that you are here simply to ascertain what are the best and cheapest of the available coal lands."

"No; I'll go without delay," was the response; "I'll go if only to show these hounds that I'm not to be frightened by any raw-head-and-bloody-bones business."

"If I'm sent across the Styx, some of them will keep me company, and soon all of them will follow."

"Should you not hear from me say within three days, notify the British Consul in New York. Then, if needed, the people whom I represent will have half of Scotland Yard here, and clear out these scoundrels—root and branch!"

There was a great deal more in this than appeared on the surface. Lightning Lew was talking for effect. He knew that, unless restrained by some powerful incentive to secrecy, the doctor would talk, as he wished him to do.

Doctor Hammil did not reply, except by a bow. He was too much astonished at the language of this man who dared brave the mountain crooks, who had so recently shown what they could do, and were capable of doing.

"And, now, doctor, what kind of a man is this Sackville? Is he easy to reach, and, when reached, do you think he will be able to furnish me any information as to who I am to beware of—and where?"

"He's in no condition for business," answered Hammil, "but he will certainly post you. Even as your representative, he would not deal with me as he would with you."

"Very well, doctor; I'll start at once, and shall have to ask you to act as my representative until I return."

"You will please take charge of these rooms and my effects, answer all inquiries, and otherwise do as you think I would if I were here."

Picking up the small black hand-bag, Lightning Lew went to his bureau, selected a few articles and left the room.

CHAPTER XXXI.

LEW "LIGHTS" ON HOGUE.

ON leaving the hotel, Lightning Lew engaged the carriage which usually stood at the door, and bade the driver take him across the bridge to the railroad station.

Short as the drive was, the occupant of the carriage had time to read and wonder at the contents of Edge Sackville's letter. It ran:

"Be careful. I have received a letter warning me not to interfere in any way towards protecting you."

"As you will probably know by the time this reaches you, a man was killed at my doorstep some time last night or this morning."

"On the left lapel of the murdered man's coat, was pinned a second warning—within twenty-four hours—that dealing with you or in any way protecting or aiding you, is dangerous."

"I have reason, and very good reason to believe, that the first warning, or threat, came direct from Colonel Parkson, although I can hardly believe that he would be guilty of inciting the crime committed last night. However, be careful of him, and of all whom you even suspect of being connected with him—relatives, friends, or dependents."

"I am unable to get out, and cannot help you in any way, at present, more than to give you this warning."

"Well, that is a letter!"

"Can it be possible that Parkson is such a fool as to connect himself with the counterfeiters?"

"And yet many, and much shrewder and wealthier men than he, have indulged in that precarious mode of making a living."

The carriage was now at the railroad station, and having dismissed it, Lightning Lew took his way on the road to Bradley's—the well-remembered Magazine Run.

Mrs. Bradley, Marthy and 'Lize were present when he entered the half-opened door.

The welcome accorded the new-comer was most cordial. Just what he had said, or did, to render himself such a favorite, has little interest for the reader. Enough that he had, or appeared to have, the implicit confidence of Mrs. Bradley and her daughters.

Addressing the mother, he said:

"I have come here to make a change in my appearance. These scoundrels are hounding me, for some reason, and I intend to have an understanding with this fellow, Hogue."

"You are the only people I can trust, and I am going to ask you to retire to the cave for a few minutes. When you hear the door bang, I shall have completed the changes which I wish to make, and be on the way to meet Mr. Hogue."

With a nod to her daughters to follow, Mrs. Bradley immediately retired to the den designated as "the cave."

As the women retired, Lightning Lew began making the change—and certainly his movements were lightning-like.

Five minutes after, Mrs. Bradley and her daughters were recalled to the outer room by the banging of the door as their visitor departed, taking his way toward the city.

The man who left the Bradley cabin was an entirely different looking personage to the elegantly-attired dapper detective, Mr. Pryce.

By means of the black hand-bag, Lightning Lew had managed to grow a pair of long black whiskers, and to change his hair to a rough, unkempt growth of nearly the same color. His clothing, too, had been altered in its appearance—and for the worse. Instead of being neat and careful, the erstwhile elegant Mr. Pryce now looked like a rough, careless mountaineer.

A half-mile down the road, Lew turned off into the woods, worked his way back past the Bradley cabin, and then struck into the road up the mountains.

He had traveled about a half-mile when he suddenly came almost face to face with the very man whom he was seeking—Hogue.

The crook was approaching the town with down-bent head and thoughtful mien.

"I say, pardner!" called Lightning Lew. "Do you know any chap in these here diggin's named Hogue?"

The man addressed stopped short, and looked sharply at the speaker before replying:

"I've heer'd of sich a chap."

"Kin ye tell me where I'd be likely to strike him?"

"What d'ye want of him?"

"I want t' see him—want t' talk to him. I've got somethin' ter tell him, that I can't tell t' anybody else; but, it's money for him 'n' me."

Hogue looked at the speaker suspiciously. He did not altogether believe the statement made by the stranger, but the word "money" caught him. Like Craig, gold was too glittering a bait to be resisted, and he asked:

"Can't you tell me? I'm a portickler friend of his'n."

"Never! Ther' ain't enough in it fur 'three.'

Hogue delayed very little in responding: "Stranger, I reckon I'm the coon ye'r tryin' t' tree."

"Great Scott! I'm in luck! I didn't s'pose I wuz barkin' so close to the right tree!"

"Well what 'r' ye drivin' at?"

"Money, pardner, money!"

"Well, let her drive!"

"All right!" returned the stranger, adding: "but, I say, pardner, cain't ye take us some place whar we kin git a drink while I'm a talkin'?"

"I tell ye it'll be wu'th yer while to hear me. It's about the murder of this here feller, Craig, 'n' that 'air swell chap, Pryce—'n' a letter thet wuz sent to Marshal Sackville."

"A guilty conscience needs no accuser."

The counterfeiter grew pale, and, after a moment's hesitation, in shaky tones, replied:

"Ye-es, I reckon I kin. Come back here a bit, 'n' I'll find a place whar we kin talk 'n' drink in safety."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE COLORED SPY DESERTS.

FOLLOWING the plan suggested by the mulatto boy, Miss Parkson waited until her father had gone out and then, making an excuse to the dressmaker, got rid of her maid.

"Now, Pete!" she called, and when the youth appeared, playfully asked:

"Now, what is your wonderful secret?"

"It's just this, miss: everybody here is watching you!"

"Julie, your maid, and myself are here almost expressly to see that you do not write, meet, or in any other way hold communication with Edge Sackville."

"It is known that you met him last week, and Mr. Owens received a severe lecture for having failed to be aware of it and report it to the colonel."

Miss Parkson looked amazed; she could hardly believe what Pete said was true.

"Are you sure of this?" she asked, and half to herself continued:

"Can it be possible that my own father is keeping me under surveillance—actually doubting the sacred promise which I made, never, intentionally, to meet the man I love?"

"It's true, miss; true as Gospel!"

"The flowers I took yesterday were allowed to go, but your letter was not."

Pete hesitated a moment or two, and perceiving this, Miss Parkson asked:

"Pete, you are withholding something—what is it?"

"Well, I might as well tell it all."

"Julie reported your having written the letter, the colonel received it from me, and, though he knew from yourself that you were writing it, and the contents, he kept it, saying that I should not tell from whom the flowers came."

"On the way I met a man coming out of Bill Kyle's, who offered me a dollar to drop a letter in the hallway of Mr. Sackville's house."

Miss Parkson flushed with anger. Forgetting, for the moment, that she was not alone she angrily exclaimed:

"This is outrageous! I have been, and am willing to do everything reasonable—in fact, have already exceeded the bounds of reason! I shall now act according to my own feelings and sense of justice."

"There is something wrong—something underhand—where all this espionage is required, and they will find that a woman can trick as well as be tricked!"

Turning suddenly to Pete, who was listening in amazement (mingled with considerable satisfaction), the excited girl demanded:

"Pete, do you intend to be faithful to me—to do what I may require without revealing it to anybody?"

"I do, indeed, miss! I have been too long faithful to those whom I find place no confidence in me. Anything that you desire

done hereafter I will gladly do, and take care that it does not become known."

Miss Parkson looked thoughtfully at the youth, apparently in doubt as to what she should do or say.

"Why not write Mr. Sackville, telling him just what I've told you, miss?" suggested Pete.

"A very good idea, Pete!" and the young lady sat down at a small desk, the property of the mulatto youth, and did do just what he suggested.

"Now, Pete," said she, after finishing a lengthy epistle, "I shall depend on you that nobody—and especially my father—shall see this letter, except the gentleman to whom it is addressed: Mr. Sackville."

"Not if I have to eat it, miss."

Miss Parkson handed Pete the missive saying:

"As soon as Julie returns, I shall send you to the stationer's for a box of paper, and when you return I shall soundly rate you for delaying, and whatever answer you may bring from Mr. Sackville must be concealed in the box of stationery for which I shall send you."

The colored youth thrust the letter into his breast, and two or three minutes later, when the maid returned, was dispatched to the stationer, with strict orders to hurry back.

A full half-hour elapsed before Pete returned, and when he did the promised scolding was administered with a severity that astonished the attentively-listening maid.

Picking up the box of stationery, and holding it so that the maid could not see the contents, Miss Parkson declared:

"This is useless for my purpose! Julie, you go and see if you can get what I require. That boy is either a fool, or so careless of the position he holds that he pays no attention to orders. I directed him to get a cream-white paper—this is pinkish. See if you can get what I want!"

"Shall I take back the box you have?" asked Julie.

"No, I can use this for other purposes, but do not delay in getting the cream tint, as I wish to use it immediately."

Julie departed, and the moment the door closed on her, Miss Parkson reopened the box of stationery and carefully examined its contents, but there was nothing in it except the blank envelopes and paper!

"Pete!" she called, and when the youth appeared, asked:

"Did you see Mr. Sackville?"

"No, miss."

"Did he send any answer?"

"No, miss; he was asleep, and the folks would not dare wake him."

"Ah!"—and Miss Parkson breathed a sigh of intense relief.

She had feared that Sackville had doubted the genuineness of her purpose in writing to him.

Lydia Parkson was a very bright, intelligent girl, and well understood that, having received with the flowers which she had sent the previous day a letter—friendly or otherwise—he might have cause for anger or suspicion.

She had heard all about the murder of Craig at Sackville's doorstep, and of the warning message pinned to the coat of the dead man.

"Very well, Pete," she said, "you must manage to call at Mr. Sackville's house some time to-morrow."

"I'll do it, miss," assured Pete.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MARSHAL ON THE WAR-PATH.

WHEN Edge Sackville received Miss Parkson's letter, he was in an angry mood—restless and uneasy, because of the dangers which he knew, as well as those which he feared, were hovering over Lightning Lew.

He was not asleep, as the servant stated to Pete, and on receiving the letter became still more uneasy.

"How I have mixed up everything!" he muttered. "I've written Pryce, and probably set him all astray!"

"If he goes among the counterfeitters with the impression that the colonel is at the bottom of this affair, he will be working at a terrible disadvantage. What shall I do?"

He was in a weak, feverish condition. The effort he had made two days before had, as his physician warned, been attended with disastrous results; but the letter of Lydia Parkson appeared to have a wonderfully stimulating, revivifying effect.

"Sam!" he called, "send somebody for Wilson immediately. And help me dress as soon as Wilson is sent for—and be in a hurry about it."

The old negro stared in amazement at his master.

"He'll kill hisself this time, shore!"

As before remarked, however, Sam was accustomed to obey—not to question, and in a few minutes returned to Sackville's room to report:

"Jimmy's done gone for Marse Wilson."

"Very good! Now help me to get into my clothes, so that I will be ready when he comes."

Sam obeyed, and in a remarkably short space of time (considering his condition), the marshal was dressed and waiting when Wilson, who was his deputy, arrived.

"Wilson," said he, "we've got a highly important job on hand. I must get out, and must also ask you to accompany me. I will explain the case as we go along. Sam, order the carriage at once!"

Fifteen minutes later Marshal Sackville and his deputy were crossing the big bridge over the Kanawha River.

"We may have some lively work before us, and it's as well to be prepared; so look to your pistols before we get into the Run."

Driving, according to orders, at full speed, the coachman quickly pulled up at the lane leading to Bradley's log cabin.

"Jump out, Wilson!" directed the marshal; "I am scarcely fit to do so; make what inquiries you think best to ascertain if Mr. Pryce has been here, and, if so, what has become of him."

"Above all things, ascertain the direction in which he has gone."

Within five minutes Wilson returned and reported:

"Mr. Pryce has been here, but has left—heading back for the town."

"How recently?"

"Within a half-hour," replied the deputy with a puzzled expression on his face, adding:

"I cannot understand how that can be possible, since we did not meet him on the road nor hear of him at the hotel."

"Do you believe the statement was made in good faith?" questioned Sackville.

"I certainly do. They appeared perfectly honest, and as anxious as you yourself."

Sackville reflected a few minutes, and, recollecting what Lightning Lew had told him of the manner in which the Bradleys had befriended and defended him, decided that notwithstanding he had not met Mr. Pryce, the women's statement was to be relied on.

Accordingly he ordered the carriage to be driven home, but, on arriving there, directed the deputy to ascertain whether Mr. Pryce had returned to his hotel—or had been seen in town.

A full hour elapsed before Wilson returned, and when he did, it was with the discouraging intelligence that Mr. Pryce had neither returned to his hotel nor been seen in town.

"Then, by the gods of war, we must look him up! Fortunately I am still dressed. We must immediately proceed to trace his movements from the time of leaving the hotel."

"Will you risk going out again Mr. Sackville?" asked Wilson, in great surprise.

"Risk!" cried Sackville; "what has risk to do with the question? I am the United States Marshal for this district. This gentleman has been threatened by a set of scoundrels who should have been long ago suppressed by me."

"It is now my duty to find that man and protect him, or, if he has been injured, to ferret out and punish those who have interfered with him."

"Order the carriage at once. We'll drive to his hotel, ascertain if anything has been heard of him, and, if not, drive across the bridge."

"After that, we must divide—you remaining around the station to learn what you can there, while I go on to pick up the trail at Bradley's."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN A TIGHT CORNER.

Guided by Hogue, Lightning Lew ascended the mountain side for nearly one-quarter of a mile, when the counterfeiter stopped and demanded:

"Say, stranger! Are you ready to take the chances of comin' in here, wud me?"

"What air the chances?"

"Well, it's jest about life 'n' death!"

"My ideeer wuz a drink," laughingly returned Lightning Lew. "If the drink goes with the chances, I'm willin' t' take 'em."

"All right; but, before you'll get into daylight again, you'll be after swearing that you've never been in these parts, and that, even if you were, you've lost your memory!"

Lightning Lew did not appear at all startled by this ominous declaration.

"Let 'er go!" he exclaimed; "pervided the drinks air thrown in, I don't keer a continental whether I swear that I don't know my own name or not!"

"All right!" returned the counterfeiter; "come right along, 'n' I'll furnish the drink, while you tell yer story."

"But, you can bet that you'd better be prepared to tell a pretty straight story or you'll never come out alive."

"Oh, fer God's sake get along!" cried Lightning Lew; "you make me real tired. I'm not afeerd of you, or anything ye kin bring along!"

"I'm here t' see you, an' t' make money—either out of you, ez well ez fer you, or out o' other people, who will pay well fer what I kin tell 'em."

Hogue looked at the speaker, wonderingly.

"See here, stranger!" he exclaimed, "if this is ennythin' private, I'd like t' know it now!"

"It is private," answered Lightning Lew, "but I'll hev t' wet my whistle before I talk."

This cool language seemed to astonish Hogue, who was not accustomed to being treated in such an off-hand fashion on his own stamping-ground, where the very suspicion of being a counterfeiter was sufficient to create a fearful respect.

They were a lawless set, these mountaineer counterfeiters, and carried things in a high-handed fashion secure in the fastnesses of their mountainous retreats against any attempt at punishment made by the exceedingly weak arm of the law, as represented by the local authorities.

It was for this reason Hogue looked so suspiciously at Lightning Lew.

"Look here! Ye talk as if ye wor entitled t' know sunthin' more'n folks gin'rally do 'bout these here diggin's, 'n' if ye are spit it out I'll save time for both of us, 'n' make it safer for you."

"Don't know nothin' about the diggin's!" declared Lightning Lew.

"All I know is—if there's a drink t' be got, even water, I'd like t' get my claws on it. I'm dry as a gun barrel."

"Come along!" sullenly directed the counterfeiter.

Turning abruptly in among the stunted trees and dense undergrowth, he led the way along a narrow, tortuous path running apparently, across the side of the mountain.

"He's up to mischief!" thought the detective, not at all deceived by his companion's apparent submission to the terms.

The daring detective knew perfectly well that Hogue would not lead him to the home of the counterfeiters in such a careless fashion, without first ascertaining who was the stranger, or having some guarantee as to his character.

If he is taking me there, it's simply because he has recognized me and intends finishing the job started the other night; so I must be watchful as a hawk!"

Then suddenly changing his plans, Lew muttered:

"I guess it's better—safer, at all events, to talk to him right here."

"Say, Mr. Hogue!" he called out, "just hold up fur a few minutes, will ye?"

The counterfeiter paused, and turning, growled:

"Well, what'n thunder's the matter wud ye now?"

"Don't be so free with yer lip. It's as well for you to stay friendly with me. It'll be safer for ye."

Hogue was fierce now, and was drawing nearer, but was brought to a dead standstill by:

"Mister Hogue, if you come one step further, I'll put a bullet through your brain—if you have such a thing."

"Well, what's all this about, anyway?" demanded Hogue, his ugly face betraying his evil impulse.

He could see no weapon, but there was a certain something about the way the other spoke which assured the ruffian that there would be no delay about producing one when required.

"Just sit down here, and we'll talk about it," suggested Lew. "I'm not goin' to tell you anything pleasant, but it is durned important—to you! How much good money have ye got with ye?"

"What d'ye mean?"

"Just exactly what I say: How much good money have ye with ye, for I've got something you'll want to buy, but I'm not taking counterfeiters for it!"

Hogue uttered an execration on hearing this, and would have sprung on the man who thus bearded him, but, even as he gathered himself the muzzle of a revolver was staring him in the face.

"Don't ye try it on, Hogue! It'll be the death of ye, if ye do!" warned Lightning Lew, calmly, and smiling at his disconcerted companion.

"You'd better set right down," he continued, at the same time seating himself on a large stone—"sit right down, my son, and we'll talk business."

Already Hogue was beginning to experience the same feeling of being in the presence of his master that the doctor and Craig had felt, and obeyed the suggestion to be seated, saying:

"Go ahead! I'm waitin'!"

"All right, my son. Now, first, answer the question I put a few minutes ago:

"How much good money have ye got with ye?"

Again the crook looked savagely at the questioner, but answered:

"I've about fifty dollars."

"Pshaw! I've wasted my time coming here!" declared Lew.

He arose as he spoke, and with a careless nod, and "Good-day to ye, Mr. Hogue!" turned as if going to the town.

"Hold on, stranger!" cried the counterfeiter, earnestly; "ye can't go off that way!"

"Why not?"

"'Cause you've said too much, and still not enough. I must have more—must get at what ye're drivin' at."

What's that got t' do with my goin' back to town, and sellin' what I know to somebody who's got enough money to buy it?"

"Well—this much: Ye don't leave here until I know what ye came to tell me—that's all."

The rough-looking, mysterious stranger laughed heartily, and then contemptuously replied:

"An' do you really think you could stop me? Why, man, I'd fill ye so full o' holes inside six seconds that ye couldn't be told from a sieve! Water'd run through ye, just as yer courage does when ye meet a man, in daylight, that looks as if he knew how to handle a gun!"

But, even while uttering these boastful words, the keen-eyed detective noticed a sudden change in the counterfeiter's face and manner, and when he ceased, the latter gave utterance to a harshly triumphant laugh.

"So! You'd fill me full o' holes, w'd ye? Now, jest let me give ye a hint: "When ye'r ready to begin turnin' me into a sieve, don't happen to forget that before ye kin pull yer gun, two frien's o' mine—one on each side o' ye'll begin turnin' you into a target!"

As the ruffian ceased, Lightning Lew heard the clicking of two revolvers being cocked, in confirmation of Hogue's assertion.

The laugh was now all on the other side of the face.

Lightning Lew was fairly cornered.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"I CAN NAME THE MURDERERS."

For a minute or more, Lightning Lew remained motionless—expressionless—from

surprise at the trap in which he had placed himself.

That he was in a dangerous position he knew perfectly well, but he was not particularly alarmed over the sudden change in the situation.

"I'll pull through all right if they don't penetrate my disguise," he declared to himself, then aloud, calmly asked:

"Well, Mr. Hogue, what are you going t' do about it? You hold the trumps, I admit, but what kin ye do with 'em?"

"I kin make you talk!" was the grim response. "An' I will, too, unless you talk purty quick!"

"You don't say! Well, Mister Hogue, when you're ready to make me talk I'd like ye to let me know, for I'd like to be around when ye do it."

"You kin bet you'll be around, and durn soon too!" savagely declared Hogue, adding:

"Now, what's that story you've got t' tell? Out with it! Quick, or by jingo, I'll roast ye alive!"

Lightning Lew smiled, as if really amused, and asked:

"Say, Mister Hogue, did ye ever hear o' the first rule to be followed in cooking a rabbit?"

The counterfeiter snarled an angry, mystified negative, and the still smiling detective continued:

"It is—to first get your rabbit!"

"Now I'm here, it is true, and doubtless covered by the pistols of your friends, but what good is that to you? You can't get anything out o' me unless I'm paid for it, and fifty dollars won't begin to touch the figure."

"Won't talk, hey? Well, I've a purty good notion that ye will sing—and loud, too—if ye won't talk!"

"Jim! you keep him covered, while Sam 'n' me get holt of him."

"Oho! It's my three friends, all together once more, eh?" mentally commented the detective, while aloud he warned:

"You're still wrong, Hogue!"

"If you attempt to move I'll plug you like a rat, and if Jim stirs I'll hear him, and give it to you just the same!"

When Lightning Lew first turned back to defy Hogue, he thrust his hands into the pockets of his loose sack-coat.

It looked as if the act was done to give force to his defiant words, but it was not, as the counterfeiter discovered when the detective uttered the last word above recorded.

The pockets of the coat had been cut, and when Lightning Lew thrust his hands through the openings, it was to grasp a pair of revolvers!

"Now, Mr. Hogue," he continued, pointing one pistol from under the bottom of the coat—straight at the ruffian less than ten feet away—"now, Mr. Hogue, your friends can fire away as soon as you like, but, don't you mistake about it! I'll get one shot at you—and it'll be a killer—"

The counterfeiter uttered an angry execration, but feared to give his confederates the signal to fire.

In a way the situation had its comical features, and Lew Pryce, notwithstanding his danger, smiled, as he noted Hogue's look of baffled rage.

"Come, let your friends get out of here," he proposed, "and I'll try 'n' patch up some sort of a bargain with you."

"It won't do you any good, even if you could shoot me down, for you wouldn't get the information at all, then, 'n' more'n likely it'd hang the whole kit o' ye."

"I knew just the kind of a crowd I was liable t' strike, so before leaving town I left a letter, (t' be opened if I'm not back tomorrow) and that letter'll hang the hull b'ilin' lot o' ye—Pate, Jim and yourself!"

"So, you see, Mr. Hogue, it wouldn't be healthy for you people to even ask your *uncle* to stay for breakfast, for my folks might get uneasy and open that letter, which'd be disagreeable for you!"

"How much bluff are you givin' me?" rather skeptically demanded Hogue.

He would have liked to feel sure it was all bluff, but could not repress the uneasy feeling sure to accompany threatened guilt.

The detective's manner, too, was so free from all suspicion of bluster that it lent additional weight to his ominous words, and

in response to the proposition that Pate and Jim should withdraw, Hogue replied:

"Will ye tell me right here where we stand, what ye kem t' say, if I send 'em off?"

"For cash, of course! *That's* what brought me here; but you'll have t' raise more'n fifty dollars of some kind o' money."

"But send them away, and we'll make some sort of an arrangement, for I ain't anxious t' go t' the marshal!"

The last startling words decided the counterfeiter.

"Jim! Sam!" he called. "You kin wait down at the foot of the road. I reckon we'll be able t' make a deal up here, but keep yer eyes skinned!"

"Now they've gone—what d'ye want?" continued Hogue, when the noise made by his departing confederates had ceased.

"First, will ye give me a hundred, good money, if I show that you're in danger and how t' get out of it?"

"Yes, if it's worth anything at all, I'll give ye that much," lied Hogue, only anxious to hear the other's story, and willing to promise anything.

"Good enough! Here goes!"

"The chap you fellows killed t'other night—"

"What?"

"Oh, it's all right! I don't care a snap who killed him—but that ain't the point. You're going to be picked up for that killing, for the fellow had seen the marshal, and told him that *you, yourself*, had threatened him—before you finished him."

"It's a lie! He *didn't* see the marshal!" excitedly declared Hogue, and then, perceiving the dangerous admission thus involved, he became both uneasy and confused.

"I believe ye'r' some spy, yerself!" he cried, and raising his voice called to his confederates to return, but quickly realizing that they were too far away to hear him, laid one hand on his pistol, saying:

"I kin call 'em back wud this, anyhow."

"But won't, if you're wise," quietly warned Lightning Lew.

"Why not?"

"Because, first, I'll let daylight through ye before ye kin pull it out; and, second, because you'd better not let them know anything about what I'm saying till you've heard all, for you'll have enough t' do t' save yourself!"

Again Hogue succumbed to the influence of the detective, and withdrawing his hand, asked:

"Well, what is it?"

"This chap who was killed had arranged to make a statement to the marshal on the night he was put out o' the way, but you spoiled that nicely."

Lightning Lew was watching the counterfeiter sharply, actually feeling his way, noting the effect of every word, and guiding himself by the expressions on Hogue's face.

"But," he continued, seeing vengeful satisfaction in the eyes meeting his, "you did not do it in time. You should have done it when you were threatening him, in the rear of that saloon at the bridge."

Hogue started violently, and in a rather shaky voice asked:

"Who says I was threatenin' him?"

"I do!"

The counterfeiter uttered a low, fierce growl, then:

"You're a liar!" he venomously cried.

"Oh, no; I'm tellin' the truth, and you know it," quietly contradicted Lew, adding:

"And besides, it's down in black and white, in the letter that'll be opened, if anything happens t' me."

"An' what are ye tellin' me all this for?" Hogue demanded to know.

"For one hundred good dollars!" was the prompt reply.

"Say, if I don't shell out, you'll go see the marshal, eh?"

Hogue spoke with intense hate, and his eyes blazed with a deadly purpose.

"Oh, no! I'll just send him word that there's a letter, with some pretty close points on the murder, to be had for one hundred dollars."

"What d'ye send t' him fur?" demanded the ruffian, suspiciously.

"Because, if I make that deal with him,

I'll offer another for five hundred dollars—one that he'll jump at."

"What's *that* about?"

Watching Hogue closely, Lightning Lew answered:

"It's about the murder of a *United States Commissioner* killed here a couple years ago."

"I can name the murderers!"

The counterfeiter shrunk back, as if from some terrible blow, now pale and trembling beyond all self-control.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MAKING TERMS WITH A MURDERER.

FOR fully five minutes, Hogue remained silent, having, after the first shock had passed, begun pacing up and down, as if pondering the situation.

Lew Pryce kept his eyes fixed on the agitated criminal. Twice his grasp tightened on the butt of his revolver as Hogue made a similar movement.

Finally the latter stopped short, and for the first meeting the disguised detective's gaze squarely, asked:

"You say you kin point out the commissioner's murderers—the men who killed Commissioner Carter?"

"Sure!"

"How d'ye know?"

"Because I've seen 'em within a few days."

"How d'ye come t' know 'em—t' know anythin' of the affair?"

"That's my business!" was the blunt and certainly very confident rejoinder.

This caused Hogue to again become savage and vengeful. He seemed now to fully realize his deadly peril.

"Don't be too sure o' that!" he warned, grimly, as if newly nerved to defiance.

"Oh, I'm safe enough—safe enough to be avenged at all events—funny things happen here," quietly asserted Lew; "but I'm perfectly willing to let you make it your business, also, and—well, yes! I will tell you something about the thing."

"I found out about it through the fellow you killed. He made the assertion that he could hang the lot of ye, for the commissioner's murder made it square. That was the starting-point, and that's all you'll get out of me till we've made a bargain here and now."

The counterfeiter ground his teeth in his impotent rage. Could the danger have been removed by killing this daring man, Hogue would not have hesitated even the five minutes already passed, but the very fact that this stranger had ventured to come to such a spot, and on such an errand, seemed the strongest evidence in support of the story he told, and assured that the assertion—that his death or detention would only hasten the work of justice—was to be taken as truth.

True, the officers of the law had seldom been able to accomplish anything of consequence in the mountains until Edge Sackville was appointed marshal, and took a hand in hunting out the counterfeiters, illicit whisky manufacturers, and all law-breakers; but, even now, confined as he was to his house, Hogue fully comprehended that deputies would be dispatched, and urged on, until he and his confederates were captured or destroyed.

"He'll never give up the hunt now, on account o' that infernal Parkson case!" thought the worried and thoroughly alarmed ruffian, and turning to Pryce, asked:

"What was it ye said 'bout savin' myself?"

"Well, I think you can get off scot-free—I'm sure you can, if we can make a bargain which I came here to fix."

"Well, what is it ye want? How kin I tell but you'll go right back on me, soon as ye get yer money?"

The wily man from New York appeared to be reflecting over the question for the next few moments. In reality he was endeavoring to frame an answer which would be a plausible excuse for getting Hogue down into Charleston again, where he could force the much desired confession from him.

"Well, I don't know that I can give you any security for your money, while I'm here, but I'll tell you what I can do, so far as that goes:

"Meet me at the little saloon near the bridge, at ten to-night, with one hundred good dollars, and I'll give you a written

guarantee that you're safe—but not for the others. They are not in this arrangement—just understand that."

"And look here! Don't fool me with the money, or try any funny games, or it'll be worse for ye, Mister Hogue!"

The last artfully added threat did more to convince the listener of the honesty of this daring stranger's intentions than all that preceded it. The man's apparent fears of trickery or treachery, and evident anxiety to get possession of the money, proved to the saloon-keeper that he meant "business" and nothing else; so, resolving to trust the stranger, he asked:

"But you said I was going t' be picked up for the Craig business? Why can't you bring the paper here?"

"Because the thing's got to be fixed up to-day," explained the artful Lew, adding, with a glance at the sun:

"There's just about time to do the business, so that when you cross the bridge at ten to-night, you'll be all right, but, take my advice and don't say a word to the others, for, as I've told ye, they're not in this deal."

"But, suppose they turn on me, 'n' swear that I'm the man?" urged the alarmed Hogue.

"So much the worse for them! That'll be as good as sayin' they were in the affair, too, while the charge against you will come too late to help them," Lew assumed, confidently.

"How?"—brightening up.

"Why, even before they're nabbed you will have been granted protection."

"Good enough! So I will!" exclaimed the rascal, gloating over his own promised safety, and careless of what became of his conscienceless confederates.

Then suddenly becoming newly suspicious, he demanded:

"Say, how kin you do all this—what 'pull' have ye got, anyhow?"

"A hundred dollars isn't goin' t' pay fur all you promise. That's dead sure."

"Well I should say not!" promptly admitted the stranger; "no one hundred honest dollars is going to pay for it—nor a thousand either, for that matter."

"The hundred's for my expenses and trouble in comin' here to find you—or one of the others. That's all there is in that figure."

"Then who in thunder's putting up the rest?" asked the astonished Hogue, "if you expect more?"

"All in good time, my friend," was the quiet reply—"all in good time. Aren't you satisfied with getting your neck out of the halter, that was as surely around it, as that you are now almost certainly safe—even from trial?"

"Yes," meekly; "but I can't help—"

"Wondering who's taking the trouble to pull you off the trap, eh?" interrupted the clear-headed ferret.

"Yes"—still more meekly.

"Well, it's too long to explain it all just now, but I will make it clear enough when we meet to night. To keep your mind easy, however, I'll let you into this much:

"The Commissioner was heavily insured at the time of his death, but the verdict of suicide, you know, killed all claim on the companies; so now, if murder is proved, the companies must pay up to the last dollar. So, you see, it's not you but the money we're after—the big stakes—not the pin-money."

A light began to dawn upon Hogue. He had remarked the use of the word "we," and now scrutinized the clothing and general appearance of this mysterious stranger with increased interest.

"Yes, my appearance is somewhat out of keeping with my real character," admitted Lew, as if reading Hogue's thoughts, much to the ruffian's astonishment.

"But enough of that; I must hurry back! Be sure not to cross the bridge before nine-thirty—ten would be better, for it may take me until then to secure the documents which will insure your own personal safety."

The detective was talking forcefully, in a business-like way that rather dazed his companion, who nodded his acquiescence.

"Now, my lad, I guess you're safe," muttered the detail from New York, as, rapidly descending the path, he approached the main road again.

Here, as expected, he found Jim and Sam Pate awaiting him.

Having heard no sounds of trouble, these worthies made no effort to bar Lew's passage, but the latter had no intention of passing until he had placed another string to his bow, and rendered Hogue still more certain to keep the appointment just arranged.

With a lightning glance the detective selected Jim, as the weaker of the two, and stopping close to him, whispered:

"Where will you be at this time to-morrow?" the astonished Jim stared hard for half a minute before answering:

"Right about here, I reckon."

"Very good! I may have something of importance to say to you, if I'm disappointed by another man."

This was strange language—very strange, considering whence it came, but having accomplished his object, Lew avoided all questioning by immediately resuming his course toward the town.

"Jim will be sure to repeat what I said to Sam, and, between the two, Hogue will hear it—even if he was not watching, and already on his way to ask what I stopped for. He will hear of it in some way, and it will make him all the more anxious to keep the appointment."

"Matters are moving beautifully! I'm having a wonderful run of luck!" the Gothamite chuckled. "I wonder how Bob's getting along with the other crowd?"

Lightning Lew made his way to the town without hindrance or trouble.

"Guess I'd better step into that saloon now, to find out who's there, and take a good look at the surroundings, for it's just possible some trickery may be attempted. Strange if it wasn't."

The always-on-guard detective entered the saloon and, making a pretense of looking for some one, wandered through and around the place.

"It's safe enough," he decided, as, on reaching the street again, he started for the St. Albans—to make a call upon himself!

He found there that no little excitement had been created during his absence, by the calls of Edge Sackville, and much curiosity was being expressed when this stranger entered and asked to see Mr. Pryce.

The mention of this name attracted the attention of all in the vicinity of the clerk's desk to the dust covered, tired-looking newcomer. What could he want of the coal-speculator.

"Some fellow who has coal lands for sale," was the general conclusion, and hearing one man giving expression to this, Lightning Lew adopted the idea.

"Mr. Pryce is absent, but if you have any message to leave for him I will see to its delivery," explained and assured the doctor, when Lew made his appearance in his own apartment.

"When'll he be back?"

"I really don't know—that is, positively, but he is expected to return to-night."

"Then I'd better come back to-night, or to-morrow morning?"

"Yes, I hope he'll be here by that time," answered Hammil.

"He looks and acts a little worried and anxious about me," commented Lew, as he descended the stairs, and passed out of the hotel.

"I'm glad to see it. It shows that his friendship is not altogether selfish or feigned for a purpose."

"Now, I'll call on the marshal. I wonder what could have stirred him up so? Something of moment to our affairs, I conclude."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"HONOR AMONG THIEVES."

REACHING the marshal's house by a round-about course, Lightning Lew learned that Sackville was still absent.

"Gone with his deputy, eh?" muttered Pryce, as he left the house. "That, of course, means business—and connected with me, too, else he would not have risked stopping at the hotel to inquire for me."

"But, what can he have learned that is so important as to cause him to leave home in the wretched condition he's in?"

"Well, there's no use wasting time in useless conjectures—I must get ready for Mr. Hogue."

Entering a small hotel near the bridge, the detective secured a room for the night, and, having procured pen and ink, proceeded to draw up the counterfeiter's "guarantee," to which he signed the name of Edge Sackville, placing his own beneath it, as if with power to act for the marshal!

"There's no time to be lost, and if he don't like it I'll throw up the whole affair!" muttered Lew, as he looked at the marshal's signature.

Then on another sheet of paper he drew up a statement (based on Craig's assertion that he could "hang the lot of them,") accusing Hogue and his two confederates of the murder of the Commissioner.

To this he signed his own name as witness, placed both documents in his pocket, and then threw himself upon the bed, where soon he was sound asleep.

"I'm tired, and may fall asleep," he had said to the clerk when registering. "If I don't come down before, call me at nine."

"It's nine o'clock!" warned a messenger from the clerk when that hour arrived, and the peacefully sleeping detective arose and left the hotel, saying:

"I'll return between ten and eleven."

He made the assertion pretty confidently, feeling that Hogue would keep the appointment.

Nor was he mistaken, for a few minutes after ten the counterfeiter entered the saloon where Pryce was awaiting him, and at a sign from the latter proceeded to the rear.

"Now," began Lew, who followed close after Hogue, "have you got that money, as promised?"

"Yes."

"All right! This is no place to talk; we'll go to my hotel."

To this proposition the counterfeiter gladly assented, because he feared the saloon-keeper might notice what was going on.

On reaching Pryce's room, the detective closed and locked the door.

"To prevent intrusion," he remarked, observing the doubt and alarm caused by this suspicious action.

Hogue wasn't quite certain of what was meant by "intrusion," but, as it was uttered in a re-assuring tone, he breathed a sigh of relief.

As was expected, he had observed Lew speaking to Jim, and on learning what had passed between them, became more anxious than ever to secure the guarantee before his confederates should have an opportunity to make terms for themselves.

"And, now, to business!" continued Lew, seating himself at the table directly in front of the crime-stained, anxiety-ridden counterfeiter.

First placing a revolver on the table, he produced the eagerly sought-for guarantee, which he read aloud, and then passed over to Hogue, saying:

"There, you can look for yourself."

He was well aware of the man's ignorance, through what he had heard in Bradley's; but Hogue knew nothing of that, and pretended to read the document, devoting a good five minutes to studying the big red seal affixed at the end.

"Yes; it's all there," he assented.

"Hand it over!"

Reluctantly Hogue parted with the precious piece of paper, which Lew received with the consolatory remark:

"It's no good, anyhow, unless you have this with it."

He then read the statement accusing the three counterfeiter's of the murder of the Commissioner, which particularly specified that Hogue had committed the deed.

"That looks pretty much as if somebody should stretch a few yards of hemp, doesn't it?" remarked the reader, when he had finished the supposed statement.

Densely ignorant, unable to read his own name, Hogue never thought of doubting the accuracy of the verbal statement, or the worth of the written one, and nodded meek assent, while protesting:

"But, it's a lie, mister! It's a lie—I didn't do it!"

"Of course you did not, you would not," was the serene response. "But, if that ever goes before a jury, you'll have a tough time trying to convince them of your innocence."

"But, you're goin' t' give it me, ain't ye?"

pleaded Hogue. "Ye said ye w'u'd, 'n' here's the money fur it."

As he spoke the crime-stained ruffian produced a roll of bills which he laid on the table before the detective.

All his nerve seemed to have deserted him. He was trembling like a frightened child, and could scarcely count out the hundred dollars.

"It's a clear case of the triumph of brains over body, or of little education over a great deal of ignorance," thought the observant detective, who pushed back the money and asked at the same time:

"You'd like to keep that, wouldn't you?"

"No, no! I want them papers!" cried Hogue, in almost fierce earnestness. "Ye said ye'd give 'em t'me fur a hundred—there it is!"

"Not much! I said you could have this guarantee for the hundred, but that covers Craig's case only."

"Now, how would you like to have both papers—and your money, too?"

Suddenly struck with a new and bright idea, Hogue asserted:

"Say, pardner, you're playin' a kind of a double hand in this!"

"Of course I am! You don't suppose I care two straws what becomes of your worthless carcass, do you?"

"Why, you should have been at the business end of a halter, long, long ago!"

That squelched Hogue's idea, and no lamb was ever meeker, when led to slaughter, than the man who now replied:

"I didn't mean nothin' wrong, mister."

("Pardner" disappeared with the new idea.) "What kin I do? Ye say both papers 'n' money—what kin I do t' git 'em?"

"Now you are in the proper statel" mentally decided the detective; and aloud:

"Sit down, Hogue! Don't get excited. You've got both money and papers right in your hands, if you care to take them."

"Give 'em—"

"Oh, no—not quite yet! You've got to do something for them, first—something which will justify my giving them to you."

"What is it? I'll do it!" was the eager response.

"We'll see about that. Now, in order to get possession of those papers and the money at all, you must put the blame anywhere you please, except on your own shoulders, so tell me exactly what happened the night the Commissioner was murdered, and why the crime was done."

"I'll write down what you say as a voluntary confession. That will kill the effect of this Craig statement, and anything the others may say afterward."

"I'll do whatever can be done to save them, after you're out of it for good, but can promise nothing."

Hogue hesitated just about half of one minute, before saying:

"All right! I'll tell ye."

He did not care anything about what the result of his confession might be, to his confederates. It would insure his own safety, and that was all Mr. Hogue was anxious about.

And yet we hear of "Honor among thieves!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE COUNTERFEITER'S CONFESSION.

ONCE having decided to tell the story, Hogue lost little time in the relation of it.

Unconsciously the fact was again and again revealed that, in claiming Hogue was the actual perpetrator of the murder, Lightning Lew had told the exact truth, although the murderer fenced around that point in speaking of it, saying that three shots were fired, and nobody could say just who fired the messenger of death.

The object of the murder was to prevent the Commissioner from revealing to Sackville the hiding-place of their particular band of counterfeiter's, which the former had accidentally discovered while hunting.

"We'd just got a-goin', and didn't want t' quit ag'in so quick, so the boss sent us t' try t' get him t' swear t' keep his trap closed, or—"

There was a significant pause, and Pryce filled the gap, saying:

"And he wouldn't swear?"

"No; he swore just the other way," was the low-toned reply.

"Who was the boss—the man who ordered this done?"

"He is the responsible party really," added Lew, to give the other courage and an excuse for answering.

It was unnecessary. Hogue had a fair prospect not only of saving his neck and his good money, but of making himself necessary (and, therefore, valuable) to the people who had interposed so powerfully to defeat justice, and would have sacrificed his own brother to gain his point.

That was what he had in mind when answering:

"I can't say for sure, but all our orders kem through Bill Kyle, 'n' we allus thought he wuz the cap'n."

"Do you mean to say you didn't know who your chief was—or is?"

"Not fur sure, because we never see'd his face; he allus wore a black velvet mask when with us."

"And you couldn't tell, from his general appearance, whether or no it was Kyle?"

"No. Ye see, Kyle's 'bout the same size 'n' looks, ez or'nary men, but the voice was like his, though the cap'n had a kind of a hump on his back."

"A shrewd scoundrel! He was wise not to leave himself open to treachery," openly commented the detective.

Taking up the Craig statement, and "guarantee," Lew left the room, saying:

"There must be another witness present when you sign that, but I'll fix it so the contents need not be known."

Going below he found the landlord, who willingly agreed to witness Hogue's signing of the confession—which was done by making a cross.

Pryce then had the landlord mark the document so that it could be identified at any time.

"And now I think we're about through, for the present at any rate. Here are your papers and there is your money."

"Now, landlord, we'll go below and seal the settlement you've just witnessed."

This was an agreeable proposition to the others. Trembling with eager joyfulness, Hogue seized the precious papers and followed the others to the bar, where, five minutes later, Lightning Lew left him hobnobbing with the proprietor.

"I have to get these papers into the proper hands without delay," whispered the detective, and, pleased with the assumption of secrecy, with which the communication was made, Hogue nodded assent.

"Now, to get my clothes back, return, and consult Sackville," muttered Lew, as he headed for Magazine Run, and walking rapidly, he had quickly covered the greater part of the three miles to Bradley's, when he came upon a man staggering blindly along the road from the town.

"Drunk!" inferred the detective, and would have passed on had not the other called to him to stop.

The voice sounded familiar, and though faint, was not that of a drunk, so Lightning Lew complied with the request.

"I want to get to the station"—began the stranger, and then the detective recognized him—the sight of an arm hanging in a sling aiding in the discovery that the supposed drunk was Edge Sackville!

The marshal was in a pitiable condition, unconscious of where he was, or where traveling to—indeed, scarcely conscious at all.

Excitement, pain and weakness had almost overcome him, and quickly realizing the state he was in, Lightning Lew took Sackville's arm, saying:

"Come along a little distance, and I'll manage to get some kind of a rig to carry you back."

They were but a short distance from Bradley's, and Sackville, yielding blindly to the "stranger," (for, as may be imagined, he did not recognize Pryce,) the latter managed to get his employer to the log cabin.

There was no light within but a vigorous pounding on the door quickly brought the double barreled question:

"Who's there? What d'ye want?"

"It's Pryce, Mrs. Bradley! I'm after my clothes, and have a job for you!"

"Hurry 'n' bring that light, Marthy!" Pryce heard the mother order.

In a moment a light shone through the cracks in the well-ventilated side of the cabin;

then the door was unbarred and the detective, half-carrying the marshal, entered.

"It's all right, Mrs. Bradley!" assured Pryce, seeing the woman fall back on beholding the dreaded, hated marshal supported by one whom they could not be expected to recognize as the elegant Mr. Pryce.

The voice, however, was familiar, and this, coupled with the marshal's helpless condition, reassured the woman sufficiently to cause Mrs. Bradley to say:

"Put him in that arm-chair! and, 'Lize, get a little whisky; he's plumb played out!"

She was a very shrewd, quick-witted woman, was Mrs. Bradley, and while Pryce was helping Sackville to the chair, she examined the former closely.

Having made the marshal comfortable, with 'Lize attending to him, the detective turned to explain matters, but was cut short by:

"Well, Mr. Pryce, yew hev fooled me right along, I reckon, but if yew take advantage of ennything yew heerd here, I'll never trust to nobody or nothing ag'in!"

Pryce understood her. She was referring to the time when he was supposed to be "out of his head," and answered:

"Mrs. Bradley, when I left this house everything except your having saved my life, your kindness after doing so, and the names of the three scoundrels who brought me here was forgotten!"

He spoke warmly, just as he felt toward the woman and her daughters, and Mrs. Bradley looked relieved.

"The best proof of my opinion—my trust in you," continued the detective, "is my coming here in this disguise, and in bringing this man, whom I found staggering along the road, to your house."

"Is he a friend o' yewrs?" quietly asked Mrs. Bradley.

"He is!" boldly declared Lightning Lew.

"I thought's much. Well, if he's yewr friend, he's ourn—though we hain't got no reason to love him."

"What air we t' do with him? The ole man'll be home by noon t'-morrer."

"Is it possible to get a wagon to-night? I'll pay well for it."

"No, but yew kin git a hoss."

"Then that must do! I'll ride into town and come back with a carriage."

The detective had removed the false beard and wig, and got into his own coat, with a rapidity which partly accounted for the name by which he was best known, and now stood ready to depart.

"Go right along with Marthy," directed Mrs. Bradley; "she'll show yew where the hoss is. We'll take good care o' him ontill yew come back."

"You'll not lose anything by this kindness, Mrs. Bradley," returned Pryce, as he departed, following the girl.

They had but a short distance to go, for the horse belonged to the Bradleys, or, at all events, was in their possession, though kept hidden in an artfully concealed hut, about fifty yards further in the woods.

The girl carried a lantern, and when Lightning Lew saw the magnificent horse, he felt confirmed in the suspicion that had entered his mind when Marthy started into the woods, namely—that the animal was a stolen one.

"But that's none of my business," he thought; "I should be thankful for use of the beast, and doubly so for the confidence they show in me, now knowing who I am."

Five minutes later he was dashing over the road to Charleston, and within an hour was back, with Sackville's own carriage.

Next morning, about nine, Mr. Pryce entered the St. Albans, and finding the doctor as expected, in the bar, surprised that gentleman and a group of inquisitive guests by appearing before them, with a quiet:

"Good-morning, gentlemen! At your convenience, doctor, I would like to talk with you for a few minutes."

The "gentlemen" all stared in amazement.

What did this sudden reappearance portend?

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MORE PREPARATIONS FOR LEAVING.

WITHOUT awaiting a reply to his intimation to the doctor, Mr. Pryce went on to his

apartments, where he found several letters lying on the table, one of which bore an English stamp and postmark. This particular letter had been separated from the others and placed in a prominent position—as befitted an important communication, and observing this, the detective smiled as he muttered:

"I'm afraid you've been allowing yourself to worry over this, doctor; but you'll soon be out of agony—or rather right in it!"

"I must get away, now. The moment Forrest's things are running right, my dear friend, the doctor, and myself, will go prospecting and—disappear!"

"You rather alarmed folks yesterday; Mr. Pryce!" exclaimed Hammil, entering at that moment.

"Alarmed them, did I? Then they must be expecting something to happen, eh?"

"That they do!" the doctor confessed. "Marshal Sackville called twice, after you had left, and seemed to fear for your safety."

"Oh, well, it's all over now," declared the coal speculator, tearing open the English letter, and, after glancing over it, continued:

"By Jove! In New York at any moment, eh? Well, it hurries us a little—that's all."

He said this as if thinking aloud, and then, addressing the doctor, explained:

"Our president is liable to be in New York any day; so, as soon as we can arrange things—get a few more specimens and prices—we must get away from here."

"Any time you say, Mr. Pryce."

"It's fortunate you can leave, for I fear my knowledge of coal-lands and their value is just about sufficient to enable me to make a beautiful mess of it."

This caused the doctor to laugh heartily, as if he rather enjoyed the situation, and Mr. Pryce joined him—seemingly.

After glancing over several of the letters, Lew finally opened one which gave him great satisfaction, for it was from Forrest—short, and right to the point.

"I am the white-haired boy among the Owenscrowd. Spent yesterday with the magistrate, to-day at the farm, and go to-morrow, for a couple days, to another brother—William, a farmer living a few miles from here."

"You can clear out as soon as you like. Parkson is just about properly suspicious of you and the doctor, and has made Owens feel the same way."

"By the way, there's something afoot about Edge Sackville and Parkson's daughter. She's rich, or will be, I've learned, and there's a suspicion of something serious between the two."

"What is going on I've been unable to learn, but there's mischief of some kind contemplated. Parkson has been here several times, and I got a hint that it was about a love affair. I 'jumped the rest.'"

There was no signature, nor was any needed, of course.

In good spirits, over the smooth way matters were progressing, Pryce invited the doctor to remain and breakfast with him in his rooms, saying:

"We can talk more freely here, and without attracting attention,"—which was the exact reverse of what it would, and did do, when the doctor, at Pryce's suggestion, went down-stairs and ordered meals for two, saying:

"Mr. Pryce and I are going to breakfast in his apartments."

"By Jove, the doctor's in luck!" commented the hotel-keeper, and he expressed the general opinion of those present, but not the remarks which followed, when somebody suggested that there must be some strong bond, some queer reason, for such intimacy on so short an acquaintance.

Scarcely anything passes unnoticed in a small town. There is so little to talk about that everything is made a matter of remark and gossip.

This was foreseen by Lightning Lew—indeed, it was the very reason he had ordered breakfast in his apartments.

It would be sure to create more talk, which would reach Parkson or Owens, and render them still more suspicious.

While eating, Mr. Pryce talked continual-

ly of the Company and of the doctor's prospects of an engagement, but, breakfast over, he declared that he was too tired to go coal-hunting that day.

"We'll take a stroll and smoke a cigar," he suggested, and, as usual, the doctor willingly assented.

"But you'll have a number of callers," he suggested.

"We'll be back in an hour or two," carelessly answered Pryce; "and, when we do return, I intend to remain here, callers or no callers. Have you anything special on hand?"

Of course the doctor had not, nor had he had for some time.

"Glad to hear it. We'll make ourselves as comfortable as cool rooms, good cigars, and plenty of cooling drinks will avail, against such infernally hot weather.

"Visitors will hardly be plentiful on such a day, but if any do come up, I think we can manage them between us."

Passing through the hall and by the bar, on their way out, Pryce remarked:

"We'll have to drop this bar business; it's no place for business men."

Hammil winced, though the thrust was not aimed at him, but was to account for their not going in on their way back—another bit of diplomacy on the Gothamite's part. It would cause still more comment.

Passing Kyle's, the doctor was astonished to hear:

"Let's go in. Perhaps your friend Crowley is inside?"

Apparently, Mr. Pryce had a very poor memory since his recent declaration against bar-rooms was so quickly forgotten.

Crowley was not within, but Mr. Kyle was, and started perceptibly on seeing Pryce. The latter did not appear to notice the saloon-keeper's agitation, though he enjoyed it—having entered for the express purpose of worrying the proprietor.

"I'll spend an hour here, just to annoy him," decided the detective, and taking the doctor into the rear, spent the time talking and smoking; but with care that the refreshments should not be of an intoxicant character.

He was, at first, inclined to call on the marshal, but decided that the latter would probably be better pleased to have his love affairs left severely alone.

After an hour's amusement in watching Kyle's maneuvers to get within earshot, and whenever he did, to say something which, to the saloon keeper, would sound suspicious, (while to the doctor it was either harmless, or meaningless,) Lightning Lew signified his intention of returning to the St. Albans.

"Won't you try a little something before you go, gentlemen?" invited the uneasy saloon-keeping counterfeiter, as the detective now regarded him.

"I have just received a new brand of whisky, which I'd like you to sample," he urged.

"No, no!" smilingly declined Lew; "the doctor's sworn off, and I've resolved to keep him company."

Hammil heard this unfounded statement in an astonishingly good-natured, calm way, causing Kyle to receive it as a fact, and to ascribe the change to some new move on the part of the man, who he was now morally certain was an officer from Washington.

He had heard of the suspicious man seen in the hidden pathway to the counterfeiters' rendezvous, of the private conversation with Hogue, and of the mysterious quasi-appointment with Jim that morning.

Pate, jealous of the others, had left the saloon just previous to the arrival of Pryce and Hammil, after reporting what he had seen and heard the previous day—leaving Kyle in a decidedly unpleasant frame of mind, ready to suspect everybody.

"I'll have to keep a sharp eye on Hogue," muttered Kyle, "and if there's the least sign of his playing double, down he goes!"

"This fellow, Pryce, was away all yesterday and last night. There was a stranger pretty close to the cave yesterday afternoon, and Hogue was absent last night for several hours."

"It looks ugly! However, Pate'll watch him, and will be only too willing to put a bullet where it will do the most good if I give the word."

CHAPTER XL.

AN ABDUCTION.

HAD Lightning Lew reported the contents of Forrest's letter to Sackville, the latter might have avoided much worry and trouble, as well as considerable danger for both, and, also, for Lydia Parkson.

As recorded in a previous chapter, however, the marshal had once most emphatically refused to discuss his relations with the fair girl, with whom the veteran detective had met him.

It was because of this that Pryce returned to the St. Albans without communicating with Sackville regarding the danger which Forrest declared threatened Miss Parkson.

The day was spent in the manner laid out by Mr. Pryce in the morning, and, as he had declared, visitors did not feel inclined to stir out, but two disturbing them during the day.

Cigars and cooling refreshments, breezy apartments, and a sumptuous luncheon, rendered the days enjoyable, or rather, as bearable as the sweltering weather would permit.

But what was still more important, this privacy rendered the hotel guests and those who frequented the house fairly frantic with curiosity.

The luncheon was ordered apparently without regard to expense, as were the refreshments and cigars which preceded and followed it.

All day the mysterious pair enjoyed themselves in a languid, drowsy fashion, talking a little, smoking a great deal, and worrying about nothing.

The doctor followed Pryce's lead, and as the latter felt more inclined to think than to talk—engaged in planning his future movements—conversation was not lively.

About seven o'clock Mr. Pryce suggested dining below.

"It's a little cooler now," said he, "and we will take a walk somewhere afterwards."

As usual, the doctor acquiesced, and the mysteriously interesting pair descended to the dining-room, where their advent created considerable excitement—all, even the waiters, being intensely interested and anxious to know what was going on all day in Pryce's apartments.

The two visitors who called on Mr. Pryce in relation to coal-lands happened to be strangers, and therefore no information could be extracted from them.

Having dined, the New York delegate and the doctor started out to take the proposed stroll, during which the former informed his companion that they were likely to be called to New York on the succeeding day.

"But, you must not forget that our departure is to be a secret one," he enjoined; "for if any of these people got the idea that we thought well of the prospect, generally, there would be a sudden jump in prices."

Hammil promised profound secrecy, and the pair returned to the hotel and passed the time until midnight in Pryce's rooms.

With everything moving smoothly, and his mind at ease on all points, Lightning Lew felt lazily inclined next morning and did not appear in the dining-room until quite late—long after the other guests had gone to business or resumed their usual occupation of killing time as best they could.

Notwithstanding the intimate companionship of the previous day, the doctor did not dare presume to disturb his employer, although he was fairly bursting with news when the latter appeared.

"What d'ye think? Colonel Parkson's daughter was kidnapped—abducted last night!" he exclaimed on meeting his friend.

Knowing very little, though suspecting a great deal from Edge Sackville's tone and manner on the occasion previously referred to, Lew did not feel particularly disturbed over the intelligence.

"My business is to prove Green Sackville innocent of the charge of conspiracy," thought he, repeating the marshal's words; and aloud.

"Well, doctor as I've had nothing to do with her abduction, I can't say that I feel particularly interested in the affair. Have you had breakfast?"

So surprised was the doctor at this evident lack of interest that he replied in the affirmative, thus losing a good meal, through an unintentional lie.

"Then I must eat alone," rejoined Pryce, "but I'll see you afterwards about taking a tramp to-day, if you're not otherwise engaged."

"And yet, those fools suspected that man of being a detective!" ejaculated Hammil, as he watched the speculator disappear into the dining-room.

"Confound it! I've missed a nice breakfast through Parkson and his abducted daughter. And he's as bad as the rest, too! Looks sour when he sees me talking to Pryce, who is a better friend to me than any of them—that I know."

"He, too, thinks Pryce is a detective—a man whose sole thought is coal-lands for the company, and comfort for himself."

The doctor's news was by this time the talk of the town.

Lydia Parkson had gone out for a drive the previous evening, and, while still a short distance from the bridge, the carriage was stopped by masked men.

The driver's appearance confirmed his story of having made a desperate, but ineffectual, resistance before the girl was taken from him, and carried off toward the mountains.

Colonel Parkson had left town about two hours previous to his daughter's disappearance, and no one appeared to know where he had gone.

Justice Owens, at the suggestion of his brother John, issued warrants, swore in special officers, and started an organized search for the missing girl.

Lightning Lew learned these acts from the conversation of those about him, when, having finished breakfast, he met the doctor in the corridor, and stood for a short time talking to him.

"We will not go out to-day," he decided and explained:

"It is somewhat cooler, and, my time being so limited, it will be as well to see as many of these callers as possible."

"If you are at liberty, come to my rooms in a half-hour, and we will dispose of the callers as fast as they arrive."

The fact was, that there was no further necessity of keeping up the farce of examining coal-lands, and the detective was only waiting to hear from Edge Sackville, in response to a communication informing the latter that Mr. Pryce and Doctor Hammil would leave town next night, and asking if the marshal had anything to say before they left.

Callers were plentiful that day, and the delighted doctor had all the glory of receiving the land-owners that he could possibly wish for.

About noon, a middle-aged colored man entered and requested a private audience with Mr. Pryce.

The doctor vainly endeavored to persuade this caller to reveal his business—believing his friend would not care to be bothered with the man.

"Mr. Pryce, or nobody!" declared the darky, and the doctor reluctantly informed his friend of the obstinate colored man's presence.

"Send him along!" cheerfully directed Lew, scenting something more than coal business in this caller's persistency.

"Marse Edge says t'come right away!" whispered the negro, as soon as Hammil had retired.

Mr. Pryce elevated his eyebrows, and looked inquiringly at the speaker, who continued:

"He's a goin' clean crazy, sah! If you don't come right smart, he'll be a goin' out hisself!"

"I'll be with him inside of fifteen minutes," replied Lew, after one searching look at Sam—for the messenger was Sackville's confidential servant.

"I've received a message from Marshal Sackville," Pryce informed Hammil. "He wants to see me about a matter of importance, so he says, but cannot leave his room, and asks me to call. So I must go at once. I wonder what it is?"

"Counterfeiters perhaps," suggested the doctor, whose curiosity died with the detective's frank statement.

"Perhaps. Well, I'm off! Keep silent as to where I've gone, and attend to everything until I return," were the Gotham delegate's commands.

CHAPTER XLI.

LOVE AND DUTY.

WITHIN a few minutes Lightning Lew stood before Sackville, or rather in his room, for the marshal was pacing the floor in a highly excited frame of mind.

"Mr. Pryce," he said, "I'm in a quandary from which you alone can relieve me. What shall I do about this abduction of Miss Parkson? Leave her recovery to the parties now searching for her, or ask you to take part in it?"

"That is for you to say, Mr. Sackville," quietly answered the detective. "I am here for one certain purpose, and will stick to that unless you direct me to do something else."

"No, no! That's the trouble—that's just what I wish to avoid doing!" cried the marshal.

"Tell me!" he continued, "do you think it would endanger the success of the work already accomplished if you were to delay to ascertain what has become of Miss Parkson?"

"It is impossible to answer that positively, but I do not think a couple of days would make any difference."

"Then, for God's sake, see if you can find any trace of her! These special officers are fools—will never find her, and you admit no harm can come through your helping in the search."

"He's afraid he's doing wrong by calling me off the clearing of his father's memory, to look for the girl he loves."

So thought Lightning Lew, divining the situation with his accustomed acuteness, and a little maliciously replied:

"I did not say that, exactly, Mr. Sackville. Harm may result from my joining in this search, but I do not believe it will."

"Then go! You can accomplish more in forty-eight hours than all of these people could, or would, in a month."

"Thank you!" acknowledged the New Yorker.

"I would go myself," explained Sackville, "but am restrained by very powerful motives but which are of a nature I would rather not reveal."

"However, if I do not hear from you in twenty-four hours I will take a hand in the game myself," added the marshal.

The detective bowed and retired, assuring his excited employer that he would do his utmost to make a favorable report within the prescribed time.

Returning to the St. Albans, Lew again brought the small black bag into play, explaining:

"Doctor, you'll have to attend to things for a while—perhaps two days. I'm going away immediately, and may not return for forty-eight hours."

Hammil looked a little curious, and Lew continued:

"It's purely business, so that really there is no time lost. Just order luncheon for us, while I pack a few things in this bag."

Luncheon was merely an excuse to get the doctor out of the room, in order to select a disguise for the work now in hand, as it would not do for Mr. Pryce to appear so deeply interested in Miss Parkson's welfare.

"They went toward the mountains," muttered Lew, as he stuffed a hunting-shirt into the bag, and with it placed a heavy bowie-knife, a red wig, and "mutton chop" whiskers of the same hue.

"Well, I'll make the change at Bradley's, as before. It's been a lucky spot for me."

"What! packed up already?" exclaimed the doctor, entering at that moment, followed by a waiter, carrying the luncheon.

"Oh, I'll be back so soon, and there is so little time to spare, that I've taken only absolute necessities," carelessly explained Mr. Pryce.

Hurrying through the eating, Lew managed to convey the impression that his "trip" was for the purpose of examining property belonging to the Sackvilles.

"So, of course, you'll say nothing about it nor of my visit to the marshal," added the detective, as, picking up the black bag, he started for the station, leaving the doctor in charge of his apartments, with instructions to receive, and attend to all callers—as usual.

An honor which the man of medicine duly appreciated.

CHAPTER XLII.

A MYSTERIOUS MATTER.

"BACK again, Mrs. Bradley," announced Lightning Lew as he stood in the doorway of the log-cabin.

"An' welcome, yew may be shore!" returned the sturdy mountain woman.

A glance had revealed to the visitor the pleasing fact that Bradley was absent, for the latter never made use of the cave, eating and sleeping in the outer room, but, to make assurance doubly sure, the detective asked:

"Bradley asleep?"

"No, he's just gone, 'n' won't be back for a day'r two, 'tain't likely. Don't want tew see him, dew yew?"

There was a little alarm expressed in the tone of the question, which Lew hastened to relieve:

"Oh, no! Just wanted to make sure, for I'm going to make another change in my appearance."

"An' yew'll want t' be alone, same as before, I reckon?" she queried.

"Well, yes; for I've got to change everything this time."

"Go right ahead!"

"Come, gals—give Mr. Pryce a chance tew dew what he wants," and Mrs. Bradley led the way into the cave.

"All ready!" called the detective a few minutes later, and as the mother and daughters returned, he disappeared through the doorway, heading for Charleston.

He had no faith in the generally accepted theory that Lydia Parkson had been seized by the counterfeiters, and carried to their retreat to be held for ransom.

"There are many richer men in and about Charleston than Parkson. Indeed, it's a question if he's not connected with these people, or the whisky men, or both, for nobody seems to know just where he derives his income from."

Thus reasoning, Lightning Lew made for the station. Miss Parkson had been seized at that point, and there, therefore, was the place to begin the search.

Notwithstanding its proximity to the town, or, perhaps because of it, the country in the neighborhood of the station was very thinly populated, and the detective spent the whole afternoon without finding a witness of the abduction.

Night came and found him still without the slightest clue. He had been in the general store and the saloon—the "news exchanges" respectively for those who did not and those who did drink—and among the residents of the few houses in the neighborhood, but not one person appeared to know anything of the affair, nor even to have heard of it in most instances.

"The ignorance of these people is something sublime," declared Lightning Lew in an angry tone, as he returned toward the country store, intending to make the best meal he could out of its stock.

"They can be more profoundly ignorant than any people ever I've had the misfortune to run across. Curiosity is something unknown, apparently, among them!"

On entering the store he found the usual crowd who frequent such places sitting on boxes and barrels discussing any and everything except Miss Parkson's strange abduction.

As is usually the case, conversation ceased when the stranger entered, but, oblivious of the inquisitive glances cast at him, Lew paid strict attention to his crackers and cheese, and soon the tide of talk was again flowing.

Shortly after Lightning Lew came in, another man entered the store, and his words caused the detective to prick up his ears, so to speak.

"What's all this here talk 'bout Parkson's daughter?" began the new-comer, but stopped short.

"Somebody's warned him to shut up!" thought the attentive listener, who was sitting with his back to the crowd.

"This ignorance, as I thought, was all assumed. Probably every man in the place knows more or less of the affair. Just to annoy them I'll stay a few minutes," and, calling for a cigar, the dogged detective deliberately faced the crowd.

Of course there was a general and vague

ful stare (which would have rendered nine men out of ten decidedly uncomfortable), but Lightning Lew could stare, too, and one by one the inquisitive eyes dropped, or shifted, as they met his keen gaze.

But Lew was not satisfied. He was just angry enough to be mischievous, and, careless of consequences, he continued to gaze at the now confused crowd, until one fellow blustered:

"What'n thunder air you starin' at, stranger?"

With the utmost gravity Lightning Lew replied:

"Pardner, you've got me; I give it up."

A general grin followed this, but there was not the shadow of a smile on the stranger's face, and believing the words were not chosen intentionally, the other growled:

"Well, you'd better quit it! D'ye understand?"

"Oh, yes!" cheerfully. "Ye see, I was was only paying back the compliment, and as you are the finest-looking fellow in the room I favored you."

All the others now were laughing, while the man addressed colored angrily, but before he could speak, Lightning Lew continued:

"I was bound to return the compliment, if possible, but I'm blest if I wanted to look at some of these ugly mugs just after eating!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" roared the other, delighted at placing the boot on the other foot, while some of the crowd scowled, and others good naturedly joined in the laugh.

The man who had addressed the detective was a big, powerful fellow—bigger even than Lew himself, and the latter wished to make him his friend, for he was the man who had spoken of the abduction.

That the detective had gained his point was quickly evidenced by the big fellow's coming forward with outstretched hand.

"Stranger, you're a good one!" he declared, grasping Lew's hand. "Let's go across 'n' git some 'red-eye' to our better acquaintance."

And, still laughing, the giant led the way to the saloon across the road.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE NOTICE ON THE TOWN HALL.

"My name's Brandean. What's yourn?"

"Lewis is my handle."

The two new-made friends were standing before the bar of the saloon, a bottle of real Moonshine between them, and glasses before them.

With the exchange of names the friendly grasp was renewed, and in a few minutes, by skillful turns, the detective managed to bring up the Parkson abduction.

"Everybody in town seemed to be talking about it when I left," remarked the disguised shadower. "But, who the deuce is this Parkson that such a row is made about it?"

"You're a stranger, hain't ye?"

"Yes; just got here," was the reply, truthful only to the extent that "here" meant the saloon.

Truthful or otherwise, the off-hand style of the answer and the careless question relative to Parkson threw Brandean off his guard.

"Why, you're behind the age!" he laughed. "The colonel's a big gun—'n' a darned ugly one when he goes off!"

"Then, I suppose he'll make it lively for the fellows who carried off the daughter?"

Again Brandean laughed.

"Between you 'n' me, Lewis, I don't think he'll be awake nights over it!"

"Oho! Wants t' get rid o' her, does he?"

"Not exactly that way, but if ye knowed yer daughter was in the hands o' yer friends, ye wouldn't worry much, would ye?"

A light began to dawn upon Lew, but pretending not to understand, he asked:

"Wey, ye don't mean to say she put up the job herself?"

"No, but he might!" and having gone so far Brandean confidentially explained:

"If ye wasn't a stranger you'd know 'at all the folks round here do, that she's mighty rich or will be 'n' by 'n' that she's just comin' of age, while nobody knows how the colonel manages t' get along."

Lewis was very dull; he could not understand, and a little impatiently Brandean continued:

"Why, don't ye see, he may have been using her money?"

"If it ain't that, it's Marshal Sackville. There was something between the marshal n' the colonel's gal some time ago, but a law-suit bu'sted it, but now, when she comes of age, Parkson, mebbe, is afraid they'll come together ag'in."

"Oh, I see! He's probably put her out of the way of temptation," laughingly remarked Lewis.

"Just so; but, don't say any more about it, for folks won't talk t' strangers 'bout anythin' o' this kind, n' don't like others t' do it."

The detective was perfectly willing to drop the subject—and his companion too—for he now had an idea of where Lydia Parkson was concealed and was anxious to get away; so, after some further talk he declared he must return to Charleston.

"I'll try Bob. I'll bet a horse he's pretty close to where that gal is concealed!" muttered Lew, as he left the saloon and headed for the County Farm.

It was rather late now—about nine o'clock, but the detective was determined to learn what he could before daylight.

"I'll play burglar, if necessary, to get in to that house!" he decided, as the residence of Owens loomed up before him.

As he drew nearer, Lew saw lights in a room in the lower story (from which issued sounds of boisterous revelry), and cautiously approaching he peeped through the window.

Sitting at a long table, on which was a plentiful supply of bottles and glasses and sandwiches, were John Owens, Forrest, William Owens, and three others, strangers to Lightning Lew.

They were evidently having a good time, and occasionally were joined for a few moments by a middle-aged woman.

"Celebrating the event!" commented the watcher.

From his position at the table, Forrest was the only one directly facing the window, and watching his opportunity, Lew held up his hand palm inward, then turned it outward, and then again inward.

It was an old sign between them, and Forrest knew instantly that Lightning Lew was outside and wanted to talk to him.

He, too, was anxious to talk to Lew, and in a few minutes, making an excuse for leaving the party, he joined his superior.

"Come away—outside," he whispered; and when they were safe from observation, exclaimed:

"You are just the man I was wishing, above all others, to see!"

"Glad to hear it! You were going to tell me you had a new boarder here, eh?"

"How the deuce did you find that out?"

"Never mind that, now. Just tell me all you know of it, for I must get back."

Forrest obeyed, and made short work of it, too, for in less than ten minutes Lew Pryce was on his way back to Bradley's, full charged with his new schemes.

Next morning the following placard was found tacked on the door of the Town Hall:

"NOTICE."

THE SPECIAL OFFICERS ARE NOTIFIED

"That Miss Parkson is at the residence of the keeper of the County Poor Farm.

"Colonel Parkson is well aware of her presence there—had her sent there, in truth.

"Miss Parkson is uninjured, but under restraint, at her father's orders.

"Why not release her from such durance vile?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

LIGHTNING LEW OFFERS INFORMATION.

THE notice on the Town Hall door, of course, created a tremendous sensation, and before breakfast time everybody in the town was discussing it.

About nine o'clock, Colonel Parkson drove up to the hotel, coming from the railroad station, just five minutes before Mr. Pryce came from the opposite direction.

The colonel went straight to his apartments, but Pryce met the doctor at the entrance and stopped to talk with him.

"Heard about that queer placard, I suppose?" said Hammil, tentatively.

"Yes, and saw it, too."

"What d'ye think about it?"

"Think! Why, there's nothing particular to think about. Action is what's wanted. The placard says, plain enough, where the young lady is, and that she is under restraint. That, it seems to me, is sufficient for the authorities to act upon."

"Come, doctor; we have business to do, if you are at leisure, added Pryce, and he passed through the listening throng which had formed about him.

"Somebody ought to go and tell the colonel about that notice," remarked one.

"Oh, he'll hear of it soon enough—if he hasn't already," answered another. "That boy of his was up that way this morning, and—"

"Hello! Here comes the marshal and his deputy!"

"Yes, and he looks ugly; there's blood in his eye!"

Just as these remarks were being exchanged, Colonel Parkson came from his apartments, followed by his boy, and a few seconds after, the latter started away toward the bridge.

The colonel did not seem to notice the departure of the boy, and stood at the entrance, gazing up and down the street as if undecided which way to go.

The question was decided for him by the deputy marshal, who jumped from the Sackville carriage, and approaching, announced:

"The marshal wants to talk to you, colonel."

What passed was not heard by the curious spectators, but all could see that Parkson was angrily excited by what the marshal said to him.

The marshal, on the other hand, was calm, but it was an ugly, dangerous calmness, and after a few minutes he closed the conversation with

"Just as you please, sir. I called to offer you the opportunity of doing it yourself. Since you will not, I must!"

"John, drive on—quick!"

The coachman touched the horses with his whip, and the carriage started at a lively rate toward the bridge, leaving the colonel, pale with anger, standing on the walk.

"He's mad, for fair!" commented the doctor, who, with Pryce, had come down to a late breakfast—in time to witness the parting between the colonel and the marshal.

"Shouldn't wonder, if what the notice charges is true," returned Pryce, adding:

"Has he been informed of what it says, do you know?"

"I don't think he has, though he must have heard of it."

"Strange he doesn't look into the matter! Why don't you inform him, doctor? You are intimate with him, I believe."

But Hammil shrunk from the task.

"No, I'd rather not approach him in his present humor. He's in an ugly mood!" declared Hammil.

"Well, you are a queer lot! Here's a man just returned to town, and finds his daughter missing. That, of course, he knows by this time, but, although it's a hundred to one that he has not heard of the placard, I'll wager a small amount that no one of you has spoken to him of it."

"Colonel Parkson," he continued, as that gentleman slowly approached, "there is something which you don't know, but which your friends appear afraid to tell you."

The colonel looked sharply at the speaker, who met his gaze calmly, and explained:

"There is a placard nailed on the Town Hall which declares that your daughter is under restraint, in the house of the keeper of the County Farm, and, worse still, that you are well aware of it."

The colonel looked furious, but managed to control himself sufficiently to ask:

"Why do you undertake what my friends fear to do?"

"First, because I've heard you left town previous to your daughter's abduction, and have only just returned. Second, because you put me on my guard regarding a certain piece of business. But, in any event, I fail to see any reason for fearing to tell what concerns you so much, and which you may not know."

Parkson kept his eyes fixed on Pryce dur-

ing this speech, hesitated a moment when the latter finished, but ended by saying "Thank you!" as he entered the hotel.

The spectators were rather astonished by Pryce's language, but more so at the way the dreaded colonel had received it.

"Gad! I thought there would be a row, sure," remarked one, and he voiced the general opinion.

Paying no attention to the remarks now being heard on all sides, Pryce and the doctor sat down to breakfast—the former seating himself facing the open door, thus commanding a view of the hall.

"Ah! started you, have I?" muttered the detective, as he saw Parkson pass out a few minutes afterward.

"There goes the colonel," he remarked to Hammil.

"If he had waited, we could have carried him as far as the Farm, for we'll be going that way after breakfast."

"Then, you think he's going there?"

"Why, of course! Do you think any sane man could rest under the imputation contained in that notice?"

"You're a wonderful man!" declared the doctor, admiringly. "Nobody here would have dared stir him up as you did."

"Rot! What is he that any man should fear him?" was the contemptuous response.

"Oh, I don't know. Many here fear to offend him; but, as you say, he's no more than any other man."

Lightning Lew was fast weakening Parkson's influence over the doctor. A month before, the latter would have cut out his tongue rather than use such language regarding the dreaded "Grand Mogul" of that West Virginia town.

After breakfast a carriage was hired, and Mr. Pryce and Doctor Hammil started to call on a gentleman who lived a little beyond the County Farm.

CHAPTER XLV.

LIGHTNING LEW JUDGES HASTILY.

As the carriage containing Lightning Lew and the doctor reached the other side of the bridge, both men saw Colonel Parkson's mulatto-boy alighting from a foam covered horse in front of one of the houses near the station.

"Looks as if that boy had been riding some this morning," observed Lew, and as they reached the spot, he called out:

"Hello! come here, my lad!"

The youth slowly obeyed, and the detective, asked:

"Did you find her—your mistress—all safe?"

The youth looked embarrassed by the question, and made no reply.

"Well, I'm really glad you found her!" assured Lew, as if Pete had answered to that effect, and, to the coachman:

"Go ahead, driver!"

The order was obeyed, and leaving the youth staring in astonishment at the occupants, the carriage proceeded on the road to the Farm.

"May I ask how you knew that boy had gone to look for Miss Parkson?" asked the doctor, after the carriage had gone on a short distance.

"Oh, it was plain enough," replied Mr. Pryce. "The appearance of the horse and the embarrassment of the boy told the story."

"Well!"

There was a whole volume of admiring astonishment in the monosyllable (uttered with a long breath more like a sigh than a word, by the doctor), but allowing the latter no time to reflect over the matter, Lew continued:

"If this Simmons property is worth considering, this will be our last business trip in this vicinity for a couple weeks."

Hammil looked inquiringly at the speaker, who explained:

"New York will be our destination next time, and I hope you'll find it a more pleasant and profitable trip than any we've made thus far."

The doctor looked delighted at the prospect, but before he could reply, a bend in the road brought them within a few yards of Sackville's carriage.

"Stop!" ordered Pryce; and as the driver obeyed, held up his hand, signaling the marshal's driver to do the same.

"Are we indebted to you for the return of Miss Parkson?" called Lew, as the carriages came to a halt, side by side.

Amazement took the place of the gloomy anger, which a moment before darkened Sackville's face.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Has she—Miss Parkson—returned?"

"I haven't seen her, but she is either home, or now on the way there," assured Pryce, and in a significant tone he added:

"We met Colonel Parkson's boy a few minutes ago, and, judging from the hard-riden appearance of the horse, he had evidently been ordered to hurry in ascertaining what truth there was in that notice. The boy started a few minutes ahead of you, but dismounted and left his horse this side of the bridge."

"Ah! Now I understand!"—and a grim smile lit up the marshal's countenance.

"Thank you, Mr. Pryce," he continued, and to his coachman:

"Quick, John! To the St. Albans!"

The doctor did not understand the real meaning of his companion's words, when speaking to Sackville, but was filled with amazement at what appeared on the surface, and before he was in condition to frame a speech on the subject, Lightning Lew was studying a time table.

A few minutes later, passing the County Farm, the doctor saw Colonel Parkson coming through the grounds surrounding the keeper's handsome residence, and called his companion's attention to the fact.

"He's been to see that his orders were obeyed!" rather enigmatically declared Pryce, and ordering the driver to stop, awaited the colonel.

"Everything serene, I trust, colonel?" he called, as the latter drew near.

The latter, buried in thought, and with his eyes on the ground, had not noticed the carriage, and looked up in a startled fashion on hearing the question.

An angry flush colored his face as he saw the speaker and his companion, but the former calmly continued:

"We met the marshal a short distance down the road, and he looked as if he'd found sixpence and lost a shilling until I told him your daughter was already home, or on the way there."

While Lightning Lew was speaking, his keen eyes had detected Forrest among the trees on one side of the roadway, close to the colonel.

"What do you mean, sir?" angrily demanded the latter. "Upon what did you base that statement?"

"Upon the appearance of your boy and his horse, from which he was dismounting when we met, this side of the bridge. From the indications of both, they had been engaged in important, urgent service—and what could be more important than the recovery of your daughter, sir?"

"You are entirely too quick in judging by appearances!" tartly declared the colonel, and turning, walked back toward the house.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A MYSTERIOUS DEPARTURE.

"YOU'LL have a row with the colonel, sure, if you talk that way to him," declared Hammil, as the carriage moved on again.

"So much the worse for the colonel; but, hang the colonel! We've got something else to think of. Do you know this Simmons?"

"Yes, very well."

"Good! That will facilitate matters, if his property is worth anything."

"It is; I know it. He has all of twenty-five thousand acres of coal land—here we are!"

As the doctor uttered the words, the carriage stopped in front of a handsome residence, and Pryce and his companion alighted.

The physician's presence did facilitate matters. He smoothed away every difficulty, and finally drew a contract—subject to the approval of the company—for the purchase of Mr. Simmons's property.

"You managed it well, Hammil!" declared Pryce, as they returned.

"It's the largest prospective purchase we have made, and I was a little anxious about it," he added.

"I am happy to hear you approve of my

part in the affair," truthfully responded the delighted doctor.

"Yes, 'twas well done," continued Pryce, musingly, and as if he had not heard the other. "Very well done! I'm safe in introducing and recommending him."

Eagerly drinking in every syllable of this, the doctor failed to notice that his musing companion was taking a side survey of his countenance, noting its every expression.

"Yes, doctor, that was an important deal," reassured Pryce, suddenly arousing from the reverie into which he seemingly had fallen.

"It confirms—your method of handling it, I mean—confirms certain opinions I had already formed, and if you are ready, we will proceed at once to New York."

They were within one hundred yards of the railroad station. If the doctor decided to go, they could leave within five minutes, and for a moment Lightning Lew held his breath.

Notwithstanding Hammil's declarations to the contrary, the keen detective had read the man thoroughly, and he knew there would be hesitation, if not positive refusal, when the proposal was made.

As expected, Hammil did hesitate, but not as long as feared.

"Why not wait until to-night?" he asked; "I should like to pack up some clothes, and there are a few little matters—"

"Never mind your clothes! We can buy all you want in Washington," interrupted the detective, delighted at seeing that he was to gain his prize so easily.

"But—"

"See here, doctor—do you want to go, or not? I'm not pressing you to accompany me to New York, but there are certain things I've spoken of doing for you—especially that secretaryship, which needs your presence with me when I present your claim to it. Now, if you do not care for the position, say so at once; I've only three minutes to spare."

They were now at the station; in less than three minutes the train would come thundering along. Mr. Pryce would board it, and then—good-by to the secretaryship of the big coal company!

Such were the alarming thoughts rushing through the doctor's mind, when Pryce struck the finishing blow:

"You are willfully throwing away a splendid chance to be independent of your wife and step-daughter, and—"

"I'll go!" interrupted the doctor, and, with fierce eagerness, added:

"Hurry, for the train is coming! Shall I get the tickets?"

"No, our departure must be as quiet and secret as possible. You go to the other side of the track, and you'll not be noticed getting on."

As Pryce finished, the warning whistle of the train was heard in the distance; the doctor leaped across the tracks, and walked back toward where the last car would stand.

"It's more than half done!" breathed the detective, as, with a sigh of intense relief, he sunk into a seat beside the doctor.

He had watched the latter as carefully as possible, fearing there would be more hesitation at the last minute, but there was no necessity—the reference to the wife and step-daughter had ended all vacillation.

"What's more than half done?" asked the doctor, wonderingly.

"Our work," truthfully replied Lew, mentally adding: "Mine is, at all events; the rest lies with Bob Forrest."

Two hours after the departure of Pryce and his prize on the Washington Express, Mr. Crowley sauntered up to the station-agent, whom he saluted familiarly and jokingly.

"Any important or suspicious arrivals to-day, Fred?" he asked.

He had asked the question many times before, and it had become something of a joke, though in the beginning "Fred" understood that Mr. Crowley had serious reason for making the inquiry—that he feared the arrival of an officer, for the Washington story had leaked out on several occasions when the hero of it was not precisely sober, or appeared not to be.

Of late the agent had answered the question jestingly. Now, however, he spoke quite seriously as he replied:

"No; no arrivals, but there were two mighty queer departures—and, confound 'em! they bought no tickets!"

"Indeed?"

"Yes, that speculator, Pryce, and Doc Hammil went on the Washington Express, and they had plenty of time to buy tickets too."

The agent evidently felt sore over the ticket question, and this made him exaggerate a trifle as he continued:

"They acted like a pair of murderers trying to sneak aboard the train without being noticed. Doc went on one side—the outside—and the other fellow on this side, and, just as she was beginning to puff, they crawled on the rear platform."

CHAPTER XLVII.

BREAKING DOWN THE CONSPIRATORS.

NOTHING has been heard of or from Pryce or Hammil, since their mysterious sudden departure from Charleston, without tickets.

Among people generally the matter was seldom mentioned; the subject was worn so threadbare, during the first ten days, that there was nothing left to discuss.

Yet, two men were still worrying over it, and as the days passed their anxiety increased.

We say two men—John Owens, the keeper, and his brother William, the farmer living near by; but there was another, Colonel Parkson.

The latter, however, did not have a man continually reminding him of the danger he was in through the doctor's intimacy and absence, with Pryce, as the Owens party had.

From the day of their departure, Crowley kept continually referring to the intimacy between Pryce and the physician, and soon began hinting a suspicion that the former really was a detective.

On the very first day he began with the agent's slightly exaggerated account of Pryce's purposely mysterious departure:

"Heard the news, John?"

"What news?" asked Owens.

"Well, I was just down to the station to inquire, as usual, for my friends, and heard that your friend, Doctor Hammil, and his friend, Mr. Pryce, took the midday Washington Express," and then Crowley went on to detail the decidedly suspicious manner in which the two men had boarded the train.

"It looks queer, doesn't it?" asked the keeper, uneasily.

"It does—most infernally suspicious!" assented Crowley, and as Owens had a great opinion of his friend's shrewdness, this did not tend to allay the keeper's uneasiness.

As time passed this uneasiness increased, for each succeeding day found Crowley more open and strong in his declarations of suspicion against the missing men.

"I'm glad they're not against me," he said on the tenth day, "for if they—"

"Great Caesar's ghost! you know they've gone to Washington—and that doctor knows all about me!"

Crowley, as we will now continue to call him, had broken off suddenly in great alarm, causing Owens to ask:

"Well, what of that, Bob? It wouldn't do Hammil any good to give you away."

"Maybe not, but I've been thinking over it and don't like his way—in fact, wouldn't trust him, if the thing was to be done over again."

"But, that isn't what's bothering me, now. Thinking over this thing has made me remember another—and that is, that that man Pryce isn't from England at all! I've seen him before, I'll swear to it!"

"Well, well, what of that? That needn't worry you," soothed the keeper.

"Needn't worry me!" echoed Crowley, half-angrily, "why bless it all! If he's the man I'm almost sure he is, he's an ex-Secret Service man—now a detective!"

"A detective!"

Owens almost whispered the words.

"Good heavens, man! D'ye know—are ye sure of what you're saying?" he continued, in more excited tones.

"Why, yes; I'm pretty sure of it, and that's what makes me so anxious."

"Ye see, being in Washington so many

years, I got to know all of them, and this man—or the man I think he is—used to be superintendent of the Secret Service Department, but resigned to open a private detective office."

This was piling on the agony. Of the Secret Police Owens had no fears, nor even of the police detectives, but of the private detectives—

He shuddered at the very thought.

"I must go to town; I've some business there," he declared, after a few minutes' thoughtful, troubled silence, adding:

"Do the best you can to amuse yourself for awhile. I may not be long gone."

"I guess I'll go over and look at those new horses of Bill's," returned Crowley. "And stir him up a bit," mentally added the great detective's emissary and representative.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONTINUING THE GOOD WORK.

As announced, Crowley's object in visiting William Owens was to "stir him up a bit," or, in other words, render the farmer as uneasy as the keeper, and he accomplished it in a masterly manner.

"Hello! What's wrong with ye, Bob?" asked the farmer when they met.

The question was called forth by the very gloomy expression of the usual jovial Bob's countenance.

"Don't know; but I'm afraid something's wrong, though John thinks it's all right as far as I'm concerned," and Crowley repeated the conversation with the keeper.

"A detective!" exclaimed the farmer, in terror-stricken tones, repeating the same words his brother had used.

"Oh, yes; the more I think of it the clearer I remember him," dejectedly declared Crowley, adding:

"I suppose the best thing to be done is to light out, for that fellow's sure to be back—though what Doctor Hammil is with him for, I can't imagine."

Owens could imagine, and groaned:

"I knew it. I said it'd come out in the long run, it always does!"

Crowley, apparently, was paying no attention to this, though really debating whether he should not pile on the agony until the terrified farmer made some valuable admission, but finally decided that the iron was not hot enough to strike.

"Well, I guess I'll go back and get ready to jump," he said, and left the farmer, muttering—just loud enough for the latter to catch the words:

"Hammil, Hammil! What the deuce has Hammil to do with my case? Can that detective be after somebody the doctor knows?"

On returning to the County Farm, Bob met John Owens.

"Must have missed meeting the colonel!" commented the detective on seeing the keeper approaching, still looking much troubled.

"Did ye see Bill?" asked the latter, evidently for the sake of saying something.

"Yes," gloomily.

"Tell him what you'd told me?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing at all? That's odd!"

"Well, he didn't say anything to me. He muttered something, but I couldn't make anything of it."

"What was it? D'ye remember the words?" eagerly asked the keeper.

"Oh, something like—'I knew it was bound to come soon; I can't be sure about it.'"

Owens's face darkened again, and he muttered:

"Yes, he was always croaking about it, and now it looks as if he was going to come out right and all of us wrong."

Crowley, standing within a yard of the speaker, caught nearly every word of this, but when the brooding keeper looked up, he saw his friend apparently buried in his own thoughts, looking moodily at the daisies which he was cutting the tops off with a light switch.

The gloomy appearance of the man from Washington served to momentarily divert the keeper's thoughts from his own troubles.

"Bob, what the dickens are you worrying for?"

"Haven't I good cause to?" retorted Crowley. "If there was anything sure about that blasted doctor, I'd light right out, but there's no certainty about what he is; he has nothing to gain, (as far as I know), by giving me away to that detective—and, anyhow, the detective's a private one, so, I don't know what to do."

"I don't want to go, but neither do I want to be juggled! It's the infernal uncertainty that's upsetting me."

"Stay, Bob, for you may rest assured that man isn't looking for you," declared Owens, and with a melancholy smile, added:

"Much as I like you, I'd give a good pile of money, besides putting you out of his reach, to be sure that he was after you!"

"It's no joking matter," moodily returned Crowley, pretending not to understand the other.

"I'm not joking—I wish to Heaven I was! No, indeed; it is no joking matter, as you may know within a few days."

"Don't leave us, Bob, for I may have a queer story to tell you, and if I do, shall want your advice about it."

Crowley looked at the speaker with a fine show of astonishment, (while inwardly hugging himself with delight), and the keeper continued:

"I suppose you wouldn't mind helping me if I got into trouble?"

"Help you? Of course I would—any way I can. I'd swear black was white, and white no color at all, if it would do you any good," was the prompt and cheerful reply.

Owens looked much pleased to hear this, and laying his hand on Crowley's shoulder, said:

"Bob, you're the only man I know who can be depended upon—the only real friend I have."

This was a sample of many conversations that followed between John Owens and Crowley, while between the latter and William Owens the next day saw the beginning of even more anxious, and correspondingly confidential consultations.

"I'm breaking them down fast!" gleefully declared Crowley, after an extra communicative conversation with the keeper.

He was not over-estimating his work, for he had become a kind of Job's comforter to these two of the five brothers—although neither of them perceived the Job part of it.

There was, however, another influence at work.

No man is infallible, and in stating to Edge Sackville that Lydia Parkson was either on the way there, or already at the St. Alban's Hotel, Lightning Lew made a grave mistake.

Sackville and Pryce had drawn up the placard posted on the Town Hall, fully expecting it would cause the return of the missing girl—the farmer preferring that method of restoring her to liberty, to exposing the conniving and treacherous father any further.

"Colonel Parkson can make any statement he pleases, to clear himself, and we must not attempt to contradict it!" declared the marshal, when Lew was about taking the placard to where they had decided it would attract the most attention.

But, the placard did not cause the return of Lydia Parkson, as had been counted upon.

On leaving Lightning Lew, the marshal hurried to the hotel, fully expecting living confirmation of the farmer's assertion, but he was doomed to be disappointed.

"No, sir," replied Landlord Woods, "Miss Parkson has not returned, nor has anything been heard of, or from her, except that notice on the Town Hall."

This was only a temporary disappointment.

"I've arrived ahead of her, for Pryce said: 'Here, or on the way.' I'll wait awhile," thought the marshal.

He waited, patiently enough, under the circumstances, for one hour, very impatiently for another half hour, and, then, as twelve o'clock struck, jumped to his feet.

"Tricked, by Heavens! They've removed her to another hiding place! Why was I fool

enough to spare him by refusing to adopt Pryce's plan?"

"Pryce's gone, now, and I'm alone! But, I'll find her, I'll find her—and, by Heavens, when I do, she'll never be taken away from me!"

"The man's a scoundrel—an infernal scoundrel! He had my promise, and it was never broken, yet he watches her like a thief, and finally treats her like one!"

Getting into his carriage, the marshal again sought the County Poor Farm, where with his deputy, he made a thorough search, not only of the keeper's private residence, but of all the buildings connected with the Farm.

On the way to the Farm, the carriage came across one of the special officers searching for the young woman. From him Sackville obtained a warrant, and with this authority the search was made, despite the threats and protests of the keeper's assistants—he, himself, being absent.

The thorough inspection of rooms and recesses, however, resulted in nothing; Miss Parkson, evidently, was not on the Farm, then.

That night, about nine o'clock, the marshal received a card bearing the name of Miss Parkson, and a request for an interview.

"It's de boy dat brought de flowers," explained Sam.

"Send him up!" directed Sackville.

He had been raging all the afternoon and evening because neither his condition nor position would permit of his personally prosecuting the search for the missing girl.

The interview with the mulatto youth lasted an hour, but before one word was said, the marshal had devoured the contents of a letter handed him by Pete.

Next day the marshal was bright, cheerful—even jolly; and, notwithstanding his broken arm, was about town attending to business.

During the day he visited Magistrate Owens, and demanded a warrant and search-warrant, to arrest all persons and search all places suspected of depriving Miss Lydia Parkson of her personal liberty.

The magistrate rather feared the resolute and loyal marshal, who, it was well-known, filled the office only because of the honor—it having been conferred on him when he was but twenty-one years of age, for gallant services in the Union Army during the Rebellion.

Notwithstanding the assumed disgrace of his father, every man, woman and child in Charleston had a good word for Marshal Sackville—and especially those who had fought for the "lost cause," because he made a point of avoiding touching tender spots.

Because of this popularity Magistrate Owens feared to refuse granting the desired warrants, but hinted:

"You cannot very well act yourself, Mr. Sackville, in this matter?"

"No, but I'll find those who can. Your search-parties appear to have gone out for the express purpose of not finding Miss Parkson!"

The magistrate flushed angrily, but restraining his temper, granted the warrants.

For the next three weeks, the residences of John and William Owens were searched at all hours of the day and night, and when complaint was made that these searches were made merely for the sake of annoyance, the marshal made affidavit that he had good and sufficient cause for believing Miss Parkson to be concealed by and among the Owens family!

That was the secondary cause of John Owens's anxiety.

CHAPTER XLIX.

HOW THE CRASH CAME.

LIGHTNING LEW and his "prize" have been now missing for three weeks.

Colonel Parkson has been absent almost as long, having been called away by a telegram on the day following his daughter's abduction, to Tennessee, as reported.

"Important business!" he declared to his friends. "I must go!" and with a significant emphasis and look:

"Lydia is safe enough; I'm satisfied. You remember Sackville was rather attentive to her? Well, she'll be of age very soon—and, you know, I objected to any further

intimacy between him and her after the suit was commenced.

"I suppose, though, it's too late now to interfere; young folks will have their own way."

This speech, made to a circle of admiring and gossiping friends, soon caused a report to gain ground that Parkson was a willing party to the so-called "abduction," of which Marshal Sackville's unwelcome suit was the inciting cause.

Of course, the report reached Sackville, but he only laughed at it. Indeed, of late, he seemed to be in an astonishingly happy frame of mind, and, apparently, took especial delight in raiding, or having raided, the residence of John Owens, the County Farm buildings, and the residence of William Owens.

The marshal, in fact, was making himself a great nuisance to the Owens family, to put it mildly, and this helped to render John and William more uneasy than they might otherwise have been—Sackville's nocturnal visits finally causing people generally to believe that the keeper was correct in saying it was merely spite against himself and his family that caused the annoyance.

At length, encouraged by the feeling that was beginning to be exhibited in his favor, John Owens made a determined stand against the persecution to which he was being subjected.

It was on the eve of the birthday of Lydia Parkson that the marshal made one of his annoying calls and the keeper refused to permit any further intrusion.

"You're going too far, Sackville!" he angrily exclaimed, and clearly betraying his resolve to resist.

"You know just how to stop it," coolly asserted the marshal.

"What d'ye mean?" suspiciously.

"Why, as you know perfectly well, we're searching for Miss Parkson; by restoring her to liberty you can avoid any further annoyance, as you are pleased to term it."

"And, as you know perfectly well, she's not here, so what's the use of keeping up this farce?"

"She was here, and may be again; so we'll keep on searching for her, Mr. Owens."

"She wasn't here, I tell you!" snarled the keeper.

"Owens, that's a lie, and you know it!" calmly declared Sackville.

The keeper's right hand flew toward his hip, but the muzzle of the marshal's revolver was already staring him in the face.

"Don't! If you move I'll cheat the prison cell now awaiting you, Owens, and I'd much rather the cell should have you!"

The words appeared to affect the keeper more than the deadly weapon pointed at him. His hand dropped nervously to his side, and in a trembling voice, vainly endeavoring to be indignant, he asked:

"What d'ye mean, sir?"

"That your race is nearly run! There is within reach of my call at this very moment, a reputable citizen who can and will swear that, after being abducted by the tools of one whom you know well—and whom I and mine have good cause to know—Miss Parkson was brought here and kept here until I caused the notice to be nailed to the Town Hall door!"

The keeper's wife, his brother William, and "Bob" Crowley, were present when Sackville uttered these most significant and threatening words, and the last-named as well as the marshal himself, noticed the terrible effect they produced.

"He'll break up to-night as sure as fate!" concluded Crowley. Looking at Sackville with assumed bravado, Farmer Owens repeated the words:

"You're not going to search this house any more!"

Nodding to Wilson, who accompanied him, the marshal, with a contemptuous laugh, proceeded to make a thorough search of the premises.

"If you attempt to interfere, I'll make you wish you had never been born!" significantly warned Sackville.

The keeper did not attempt to interfere. Both himself and his brother appeared to be terror-stricken, and, when, having completed his search, the marshal left, saying: "You'll

not last long, Owens!" the brothers were fairly panic-stricken.

"Leave us!" the keeper ordered of his wife, and when she had gone, the keeper looked inquiringly at the farmer.

"Yes, yes! You can't do it too quick!" replied the farmer.

"Bob, you've got to hear a story, and I want your advice about it!" explained John Owens.

"By George, it's coming!"

Crowley's work was about done!

CHAPTER L.

A TRAITOR'S DOOM.

NOTWITHSTANDING his "guarantee," for which he had given so much, Hogue felt uneasy.

He did not care a fig about the ultimate fate of his confederates in crime, but did fear their vengeance—should he be discovered.

It was this uneasy feeling which caused him to leave the counterfeiters' cave at about the very time Edge Sackville was striking terror to the hearts of John and William Owens.

Hogue went straight to the place where he had met Pryce, and inquired of the saloon-keeper if the latter had been there during the evening, or if he (the saloon-keeper) knew where the detective was to be found.

Both questions were answered in the negative, and the counterfeiter left for home with a queer feeling of impending danger.

Half a minute after Hogue's departure, Pate entered the saloon, saying he was to have met a friend there, and describing his confederate, asked if the latter had yet arrived.

"Just gone," replied the saloon-keeper, adding: "But you're nothing like the man he was looking for."

"Sure of that?" asked Pate.

"Of course!"—and the other described Lightning Lew, as he had appeared the night of Hogue's confession.

"Thank ye!" returned Pate; "I'll hurry an' mebbe ketch him."

There was no "mebbe" about it, nor did Pate intend there should be.

"I'll wait till he gets into the hidden path," muttered Pate, as he hurried across the bridge; "then we'll have no trouble buryin' him!"

All unconscious of the danger hanging over him, Hogue slowly returned toward the counterfeiters' headquarters.

But he never arrived there, for shortly after he had turned into the path, a dark form stole up behind him, and, with one quick stroke, the crime-stained traitor was traveling the road upon which he had started many good and evil men—to judgment!

"There! I'll guarantee you won't be far away in the mornin'!" muttered the remorseless ruffian, Pate, as he continued on the way to the rendezvous.

"Marshal Sackville's in?" asserted, rather than questioned, "Bob" Crowley, at midnight following the marshal's inspection of the Owens residence.

"Yes, sir!" hesitatingly admitted Sackville's confidential man, looking sharply at the speaker, and the two men who stood a little behind, on each side of him.

"Yes, he's in bed," continued Sam, "an' I ain't a-goin' t' disturb him, 'less it's sumfin' that kean't wait 'til mornin'—not much I ain't!"

"Get out of the road—or show us the way to his room, at once!" sternly ordered Bob. "This is business, and infernally important business, too! Hurry up, Smoky!"

The style of the delivery of the order was enough for Sam, and he was already on the way to Sackville's rooms, when the explanation was made.

"Mr. Sackville, two of the Owens party are below—anxious to make a confession as I've advised them to do!"

Thus spoke, "Mr. Crowley," who had followed the negro to Sackville's room.

Within five minutes, the marshal was up and dressed—ready to receive his visitors.

"Show those gentlemen the way, since you've piloted them so far," he smilingly directed the, also, smiling Bob.

CHAPTER LI.

IN NEW YORK—THE MARSHAL AND THE MISSING GIRL.

ON arriving in New York, Pryce and Hammil went at once to one of the best hotels, and after dinner, retired to their rooms, where the former sent for a file of papers, and looked up the "Hotel Arrivals."

"Not here yet? That's queer!" he commented, just loud enough for his companion to hear. "Wonder if Black Friday has anything to do with it?"

The panic of '73 had just passed, and the doctor—who was anything but a financier, and who was anxious to secure the partly-promised position—not liking Mr. Pryce's angrily-disappointed tone, replied:

"Of course it has!" and from that day on began to play the comforter—Mr. Pryce suddenly developing into a very uneasy, impatient man.

"Here I am spending my money, without knowing if it will ever come back. These men are liberal enough—if the thing goes through, but if it don't, I'm out every cent of what—"

"Oh, don't fear, Mr. Pryce! It will come all right in a short time. Your people are naturally a little timid about touching anything American, because of the recent panic!"

That was the substance of Pryce's complaint, and the doctor's consolation, when twice each week the former received an English-stamped and post-marked letter, announcing that the president of the company to be, was detained by business in London.

After the first week, Hammil suggested:

"Why not go to a cheaper hotel, Mr. Pryce?"

The suggestion was acted upon immediately, and for three or four days there were no more complaints, but the next foreign mail brought a renewal of them—and of the suggestion, which was again acted upon.

From Pryce's tone, the doctor feared that his friend would not await the coming of the president, but would return to England, sending him, the doctor, home to Charleston.

"And I cannot afford to go back, now, until I've got something out of this," thought Hammil; so he continued to play comforter, and to suggest reducing expenses, for even in the third-rate hotel to which they removed at the beginning of the third week, he was living in comparative luxury.

"The doctor, moreover, had had his faith strengthened by a visit from two of the American stockholders—General Littlefield and Mr. Jones, to whom he explained all about the coal-lands and from whose conversation he became satisfied that the secretaryship of the company—"at a fat salary"—was his as soon as business was begun.

At length one morning during the fourth week of their residence in New York, Pryce received several letters—all in different handwriting, all from the same place: the office of Scott & Littlefield; and with a pleased look, not at all assumed, he exclaimed:

"At last!"

Hammil looked curious, and the other explained:

"The president will be in town to-morrow, and at ten we must call on him."

To explain this he must return to Charleston, leaving the delighted doctor and his no longer gloomy friend enjoying in anticipation what the morrow was to bring forth.

On the same night that Marshal Sackville paid his last visit to the County Farm, which visit resulted in bringing John Owens and his brother to the confessional, (all through the advice and assistance of their friend, Mr. Crowley), Colonel Parkson returned to Charleston by the midnight train, arriving at the very time Sackville was "listening to confessions" which Mr. Crowley was putting into writing.

Early on the following morning, the colonel left the hotel, and at a leisurely gait crossed the great Kanawha Bridge, going toward the County Farm.

Passing the keeper's residence, he paused for a few moments, as if debating whether or not he should call, but it was still quite early and he walked on.

About three miles further on was the farm of another Owens—James—and moving leisurely, and thinking deeply, Colonel Parkson spent an hour reaching this spot.

Outside, he paused, looking doubtfully at the house, and muttered:

"It's strange, very strange, that this uneasy feeling should still be hanging over me! Everything is all right—or will be when the case is decided. There is only \$50,000 gone out of her estate. I can easily make that good when I win, as I must, the lawsuit."

"She has been very obedient—never questioned any papers I've offered for signature, and will be glad to sign this \$25,000 check—which will pretty near close her account—to enjoy liberty, and a trip to Europe."

"By the time she returns, the suit will have been decided in my favor, and everything made right."

"But what a disastrous venture that Tennessee business was! Twenty thousand gone at one crack!"

"I'll go into some legitimate business as soon as possible; this 'moonshine' affair is played out."

A half-hour before Parkson, another man arrived at the residence of James Owens—Edge Sackville.

On entering, and meeting the head of the house, the marshal quietly ordered:

"Have Miss Parkson informed that I am here, awaiting her!"

The farmer started back in amazement. He wanted to lie—his orders were to lie—but this quiet, but terribly determined-looking man scared him, and he got no further than:

"I—I—don't understand."

"That will do! Do you want me to tear this house apart and run you into prison?"

"No, no! What'd ye do that for?"

"Owens, I know exactly where you have Miss Parkson confined. Here is a diagram of your upper floor. That red cross indicates Lydia's room."

He was forgetting himself, but the farmer was too excited to notice it.

"Here, too, are the confessions of your brothers, John and William, regarding the devilish plot you aided and abetted, against my noble father!"

"I have known for over three weeks, that Miss Parkson was here, and could have released her and jailed you at any stage of the affair, but you treated her kindly, and that will count in your favor."

"Step lively, now, and do as I bid; and see that we are not disturbed for a few minutes after Miss Parkson comes down!" added the marshal, as the other meekly departed to do as his new master had ordered.

Five minutes later, Lydia Parkson entered the parlor where Sackville was awaiting her.

"Oh, Ed!"

CHAPTER LII.

AND LAST.

"The cunnel's standing at the gate!"

A vigorous pounding on the door accompanied by the foregoing announcement, interrupted the lovers.

"Send him right in here!" called back Sackville.

"Dear Ed! You'll be careful. Remember there must be no quarrel!"

"There will be no quarrel, Lydia. I'll simply state, and prove a few facts, and you'll find, I think, that there will be no further objection to our marriage."

The girl blushed rosily; the man looked at her tenderly. He was calm; no vengeful feelings disturbed him. The honorable name of Green Sackville would be cleared that day, and that was all the gallant son cared for. She saw this, and left the parlor, happy and contented.

Neither could foresee the tragedy that was to follow the meeting between the colonel and the marshal.

As Lydia left the room through one door, her father entered at the other—starting back in alarm on seeing Sackville.

"Ha! You here?" he exclaimed, his face flushing with hot anger.

"Yes, colonel, as you see, I am here—and here to stay until your daughter leaves."

"Please take a seat—I've something to say to you."

A half-hour after. Colonel Parkson is returning homeward. Near the Great Kanawha River he entered a path diverging from

the main road, but leading down to the river.

"He has all the proofs," he muttered, "and will surely clear his father's name. That means that I am disgraced—ruined!"

"Notwithstanding his promises, he will have to expose me. He cannot do other wise. But I will not await it. I'll finish it, right here!"

When Colonel Parkson uttered the ominous words, he was near the river-bank, and, deliberately drawing a pistol, placed the muzzle to his right temple.

Crack!

That was all there was of it.

The office of Scott & Littlefield, in New York.

Enter Mr. Pryce and Doctor Hammil.

The doctor has been "treading on eggs" ever since leaving the hotel.

He was awake at seven in the morning, and from that time until nine kept urging Lightning Lew to "get up."

At nine-thirty they started down Broadway—the doctor walking on the metaphorical eggs.

At ten they entered the office of Scott & Littlefield, through a door on which was the sign "President."

"Is Colonel Scott in?" asked Pryce.

A fine-looking man, sitting at a desk in the center of the room, answered in the affirmative, and motioning his visitors to seats, asked:

"Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?"

"Tell him all about the coal business, and do the best you can for me!" whispered Lightning Lew, and aloud:

"This is Doctor Hammil, Colonel Scott."

With which Lightning Lew left the room.

For a good two miles the doctor had carried the black sachel, full of coal samples, and was now eager to begin expatiating upon them.

He had uttered about a half-dozen sentences, when "Colonel Scott" interrupted him:

"What are you talking about?"

"Why, coal, of course!"

The doctor was proceeding to deliver his lecture upon the samples drawn from the black bag, when he was interrupted sharply by Colonel Scott:

"See here, my man! I don't know what you are talking about. And, another thing: don't you think that there is something queer about that man Pryce?"

"Queer? Why, he is the most popular man in Charleston, and a fine fellow. There's nothing queer about him."

"Perhaps not," returned Colonel Scott, and opening a bundle of papers, and selecting one of them, asked:

"Did you know a man named Crowley?"

"Yes"—wonderingly.

"Do you recognize that handwriting as yours?"

The doctor looked at the paper handed him, and saw his own letter of introduction of Robert "Crowley" to John Owens.

"Yes; it is mine!" he declared, in an amazed tone.

"And you recognize this handwriting, doctor?"

"Yes, it is that of John Owens."

Colonel Scott was pointing to the signature to one of two long documents which he held in his hand. They were the confessions extracted from John and William Owens.

For a full minute Hammil stood staring at the speaker; then he said:

"You've got me! What do you want?"

In reply, Colonel Scott exhibited the confessions which he had received the previous night from Forrest—or Crowley—and the doctor squarely admitted that he had not heard any such conversation as had been attributed to the late U. S. Commissioner and Mr. Green Sackville. The words of his affidavit, he declared, had been put into his mouth; he knew nothing of the alleged conversation. In fact, he did not believe it ever occurred.

Twelve months later.

There is a very quiet, but none the less interesting, wedding at the residence of the late Colonel Parkson. The principals are Lydia Parkson and Edge Sackville, and among the most heartily-welcomed guests

are Lightning Lew and Fighting Bob Forrest—and these latter were none the poorer for having attended that wedding, although their employers positively refused to accept the enormous reward offered by Edge Sackville for the clearing of his father's name.

THE END.

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